



# The NEON Awards 2019 Nominees

2 May 2019





# Welcome to the NEON Awards 2019

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

The following pages demonstrate the outstanding work carried out by the nominees. With over 90 nominations, shortlisting was a difficult process and it has highlighted the excellent work that is being carried out by both institutions and individuals across England and Scotland.

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 have come into contact with and whom you have inspired through your dedication and hard work.



**Dr Graeme Atherton**  
Director, NEON

# NEON Widening Access Initiative (Outreach) Award

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## The Access Project

The Access Project is an innovative education charity that helps bright young people from disadvantaged backgrounds gain places at top universities. Volunteers are trained and supported to be effective tutors who work with students for an hour a week to raise their grades. Working in schools across the Midlands and London, it raises attainment through one-to-one tuition. Its university readiness programme raises aspirations and develops the skills students need to access university. The programme is unique in that it is a long-term intervention with staff based in school, combining mentoring and tutoring, tailored to the individual student. The program also allows close collaboration with teachers in areas students need most support in, without adding to teacher workload. Working in 31 schools, with over 1,000 tutors supporting 1,360 students - both alumni and head teachers describe the programme as life-changing. In 2018, 68% of pupils out-performed their peers at GCSE; 80% of students achieved grades 5-9 (C to A\*) and had students place at 21 of 24 Russell Group institutions.

## BrightMed

University of Sussex, Brighton & Sussex Medical School

BrightMed is a longitudinal access programme for young people aged 12-18, designed to help young people realise aspirations, encourage attainment in STEM subjects and support applications to medicine. BrightMed began in 2006 and has had demonstrable success with over 150 current medical students and doctors graduating from the programme. Around 250 students in Years 9-12, each, attend 5 Saturday sessions per academic year and a final week-long residential in addition to educational trips, visits and one-to-one e-mentoring support by medical students. BrightMed empowers current medical students to design and deliver the curriculum, thereby developing their knowledge and understanding of pedagogical principles and practice that benefit them in their future careers as doctors, contributing to the retention and success of current undergraduate students. BrightMed has been successful in removing the medical profession from the pedestal that so many place it on and demonstrates to young people from underrepresented groups and non traditional backgrounds that it is an achievable career.

## Medical Aspirations

University of East Anglia

Medical Aspirations provide students from widening participation backgrounds with the knowledge and support to apply to medical school. The Scheme aims to reduce opportunity gaps - public speaking, debating, leadership and team work, all vital for a career in medicine - and provide attendees with missing skills and experiences. The scheme begins with a three-day residential. Follow-up activities include UCAT test preparation, mock interviews and a three-day GP placement. Participants can also win a scholarship worth £9,250 per annum. Since the scheme started, there have been 239 participants. 59% of 2018 scheme participants (17/29) applied to study medicine at UEA in 2019. The results of the participant surveys - pre and post - highlight the impact of the scheme on aspirations to enter higher education.

# NEON Widening Access Initiative (Retention and Progression) Award

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## The HELM Project

Blackpool and  
The Fylde College

Blackpool and The Fylde College's student cohort includes high numbers of under-represented students: over 60% of the current student body derives from areas of low participation backgrounds. The Higher Education Learning Mentors (HELMs) – created in 2007 – focuses on encouraging all HE students not only to remain on course and achieve, but to also have a positive experience. The tangible impact on retention is emphasised through student feedback: 35% of current students who responded to recent feedback requests expressed that they had considered withdrawing from their course. Of these, 88% stated that HELMs had supported them to remain by listening, advising, motivating and helping them to develop confidence. The feedback also highlights the positive changes made by students, which included grades increasing from D to B+ with regular use of the service. The focus on positive changes made by students is a key element of the drive to increase student independence and foster deeper learning habits.

## KU Cares

Kingston University

KU Cares has been developed to support the retention and success of some of the most vulnerable students at Kingston University. Situated within a comprehensive programme of outreach, transitional guidance and inclusive support, it provides a package of pastoral guidance, targeted interventions and financial support for those facing significant barriers to accessing and succeeding within HE. KU Cares represents Kingston's entire student lifecycle, cross-institutional approach to supporting access, success and progression. KU Cares, which supports approximately 230 current undergraduates and around 50 applicants each year, uses robust datasets to monitor the impact of the scheme and evidence its success. Kingston's evaluation framework ensures the work in access, participation and inclusion is informed by a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. KU Cares consults with students and a broad range of stakeholders to understand the challenges and barriers that learners may face, to ensure these are effectively addressed and diminished.

## Plus Programme

University of Leeds

The Plus Programme was created to bring the non-continuation of students from under-represented backgrounds below the university average; with secondary objectives of improving attainment and progression. Just under half of the students at University of Leeds are from low participation neighbourhoods (LPN) in England, a third are from BAME backgrounds and 16% have a declared disability. Since its inception, non-continuation rates for LPN students involved in the Plus Programme have been lower than the general LPN University cohorts who have not received the intervention. The Plus Programme provides a seamless transition to University, improves non-continuation rates amongst students from underrepresented groups, whilst contributing to additional successful outcomes such as degree attainment and progression into graduate jobs and/or postgraduate study. Over 1000 participants join the programme each year (3000 in total). Data analysis and contextual admissions information ensures that students joining include those who are from low income families, have experienced educational disadvantage, are estranged from parents or are refugees.

# NEON Widening Access Partnership Award

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## Kent and Medway Progression Federation

KPMF

KMPF has always worked as a collaboration of equals, governed by a steering group where there are as many head teachers as universities driving the agenda to offer free outreach activities to disadvantaged young people. When funding from Aimhigher ended, Canterbury Christ Church University, University for the Creative Arts, University of Kent, local authorities and over 50 schools agreed to continue a collaborative approach to outreach. The depth of understanding across sectors that had developed through Aimhigher, was felt to be too valuable to lose - sharing data, working on joint targeting criteria, promoting one another's outreach activities and aiming to provide a varied palette of activities. The KMPF Directorate brings together senior managers to provide strategic direction, and ensures that key decisions are made in consultation. The national progression rate of those from POLAR3 quintiles 1 and 2 is only 25%, yet KMPF has improved the progression rate for this group to 30%.

## Finding Our Futures

University of Surrey

The partnership between the University of Surrey and Kings College, Guildford is a truly embedded partnership, focused on developing aspirations and attainment toward HE studies. Since 2016/17, the University has employed a Widening Participation (WP) Coordinator, who is based at the school - a simple but revolutionary idea that's changed how they interact. The Polar4 HE participation rate of the area is only 17.8% and 92% of the school's students are from one or more underrepresented groups. The school doesn't fit the preconception of Guildford as a place of affluence. The aim of the partnership was to impact positively on the local community and to empower young people and their families. The WP Coordinator works closely with students and their families, providing a level of support beyond the expectations of usual school/university relationships. The University and school have developed an aspirational curriculum to coexist with and build the school's curriculum and support academic and personal development.

## Reading Together

Queen's University Belfast

Literacy project - Reading Together - was designed to improve the educational outcomes of young children in care. Young people in care are the least represented in the higher education system, predictors for this community fall way behind their peers at every stage of their lives. Queen's University Belfast (QUB) staff from different departments, and students and staff from a Health and Social Care Trust have combined their expertise to help improve outcomes for children in care. Reading Together develops the literacy skills of children ages 7-9 years by providing them with individual reading support on a weekly basis. The project also provides social opportunities to help children forge connections with the university, and provide a bank of memories to help them make decisions about their education. It is anticipated that these social activities will impress on this group of children that higher education is accessible to them and a realistic progression route for them.

## The Service Children's Progression Alliance

University of Winchester

The Service Children's Progression (SCiP) Alliance has taken an evidence-led approach - produced by the University of Winchester - to developing a national strategic solution to supporting the educational progression of children from military service families, by developing a UK-wide collaborative network of cross-sector partnerships. The SCiP board drives strategic direction and is made up of policy leads from military Family Federations, HE, FE, Hampshire County Council and the Ministry of Defence alongside practice and research leads and the voice of service students. Shared leadership has been facilitated through a network of hubs which support hundreds of HE, FE, schools and community professionals so that new ideas and effective practice can be developed and shared nationally. The work of the SCiP has ensured that Service Children are now recognised as a WP target group by OfS, and increased the commitment to this agenda through HEIs Access and Participation Plan's and involvement in a UKwide hub network.

# NEON School or College Widening Access Award

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## Energy Coast University Technical College

As a unique education establishment, Energy Coast University Technical College (ECUTC) offers STEM based education to young people aged 14–18 in West Cumbria and allows entry to university but to higher and degree apprenticeships as well. The school gives disadvantaged young people the opportunity to study a more practical based curriculum aligned to their passions. Working in conjunction with the University of Cumbria on a two-year project that focuses on year 10 in the initial stages, ECUTC aims to change teaching styles and include students in more dialogic learning. An experimental approach aims to not only increase classroom engagement but also increase pupil motivation along with attainment and aspirations, therefore leading to more young people from widening participation backgrounds feeling confident and capable in accessing L4+ education. All staff at the ECUTC will be involved with approximately 100 disadvantaged pupils. The school will measure their progress using a variety of measures against a control group of non-disadvantaged pupils to gauge the success of the project.

## Kings College, Guildford

A state secondary school in an area that differs from people's perceptions of Surrey. The school is located 1 mile from the University of Surrey; a ward with the highest child poverty rates and the second lowest for child wellbeing. The Polar4 HE participation rate is only 17.8% whereas the average in Guildford is 68.1%. The school fully recognises the importance of beginning work as soon as students arrive, to raise awareness and aspiration for future pathways and support them in making progress to achieve KS4 results conducive to HE. High Aspirations is an objective in Kings College, Guildford pupil premium strategy and the school's development plan demonstrates a commitment to supporting aspirations and lifelong education. The 'Kings Offer' is being developed to provide students with cultural capital experiences such as museum visits and theatre trips.

## Peacehaven Community School

Peacehaven Community School is a mixed secondary school in East Sussex with a high pupil premium and percentage of students from POLAR4 Q1. The school has implemented an effective strategic approach to engage a core group of WP identified students across their secondary life-cycle with a range of outreach activities from local HE providers, NCOP and employers. The school aims to engage all students who meet WP criteria with an activity each academic year. This year approximately 720 students have taken part in a widening access activity. The school engages with a BAME mentoring project run through the University of Brighton to support BAME students. In 2018/19 alone, the school has engaged with 47 outreach projects and activities, including 10 employer visits. Alongside extensive engagement with local university WP offers, the school also hosts large scale employer events, such as 'Open Doors' which links students from WP backgrounds with over 20 local companies who raise awareness of apprenticeship opportunities. The current cohort have the highest number of students on the Brighton & Sussex Medical School 'BrightMed' scheme.

# NEON Student of the Year Award

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## Leanne Armitage

St George's, University  
of London

Leanne founded the 'Leanne's Amazing Medics' programme, which seeks to equip young people with information and advice to increase their confidence in the ability to apply for a degree in medicine. The programme is delivered to thirty students each year. The 2017-2018 cohort of students took part in a research study investigating the impact of the programme on their motivation to apply for a career in medicine, and their self-confidence in doing so. Many students expressed an improvements in their communication skills, self-confidence, aspiration, motivation and academics. She has since founded her own charity, the Armitage Foundation, and is working to expand the programme across London.

## Salma Mahmoud & Hawwa Bham

Lancaster University

Hawwa and Salma have worked tirelessly to raise the profile of widening participation amongst the student body at Lancaster Medical School (LMS). They have done this through volunteering for the many projects run by LMS. They have represented LMS at national forums such as the Medical School Council Student Conference, in 2016 and 2018, connecting with other medical students to develop an active student-led programme of outreach, complementing the current range of activities and initiatives at the medical school. Salma and Hawwa also developed a student-led initiative to support Year 12 students seeking work experience to support their application to medical schools across the UK. Working with staff both at the university and University Morecambe Bay Trust, they developed a four-day event whereby Year 12 students 'shadowed' 5th year medical students on rotation in hospitals.

## Allison Vitalis

The University of  
East London

A current mature student at The University of East London (UEL) who has been working as Student Ambassador with the Widening Participation (WP) team for over two years, Allison has contributed to the WP team by designing high quality content that other ambassadors can use, helping the WP team up-scale their programmes, and training and supporting newer ambassadors in the role. Coming from a university based in Newham (a high knife crime rate borough) knife crime/gang related violence cannot be ignored as a contributing factor to disengagement with education. Allison's civic engagement work in collaboration with The "Charlie Burns Foundation" opened the university up to community groups and young people. University visits contribute to raising awareness, raising aspirations and showcasing UEL as an inclusive and welcoming university. Allison is leading on an event where those affected by knife crime in the local area will be invited. Allison is a Mum of two and has juggled all these commitments with her final year of undergraduate study, and family life.

## Rochelle Watson

Kingston University

Rochelle enrolled at Kingston as a mature student, a single parent, and with unpaid caring responsibilities for her mother. Since the beginning of her studies, she has been incredibly engaged with every extra-curricular opportunity the University has to offer. She has become an advocate for young adult carers and raised the profile of the need to support this student group. As a Student Ambassador, Rochelle has supported the delivery of outreach events with 'hard to reach' groups, is a senior course representative, and is involved on two University 'Student Academic Development Research Associate Scheme' projects with her faculty academics. Rochelle regularly volunteers at the Kingston Family Contact Centre and supports non-residential parents who wish to see their children. Rochelle has an innate passion for the mental health and wellbeing of young people, particularly those who, like herself, are impacted by parental mental health difficulties.



# NEON Contribution to Widening Access Award

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## Ian Freedman

Harper Adams University

Not just a great advocate for HE outreach work, Ian has been instrumental in raising the profile of outreach across the institution and delivering some innovative projects. He has transformed Harper Adams' overall access strategy and delivery. The key component to this step was the recognition that whilst NCOP and the institutional WP programmes had their own targets and their own budgets, there were considerable opportunities to find valuable synergies between the two work streams and also efficiency benefits in terms of eradicating duplication of effort. Perhaps the biggest single initiative that demonstrates Ian's ambition to do things differently was the idea to create a festival, 'Field to Fork', as the flagship of Harper's combined NCOP and Access objectives. Uniting the university's community (students, academics, professional services and alumni), this was the biggest event the university had ever hosted. The festival has now become a yearly fixture at the university.

## Lisa Jackson

University of Cumbria

Lisa has worked within widening access for six and a half years and currently works as Cumbria Collaborative Outreach Programme Manager. She was the first in her family to go to university and is therefore aware of regional barriers to progression. She is passionate that Cumbrian young people have access to a wide variety of opportunities, both locally and further afield. The geographical spread of students in the region can make work challenging and Lisa is always proactively looking for ways to respond to the differing needs of the rural, coastal and dispersed nature of Cumbria by encouraging the design of new and innovative activities, and ways of working, in order to meet those needs. Always keen to improve ways of working, Lisa seeks feedback to ensure the needs of the Cumbrian context is met. For example, Lisa commissioned research to look at rural contexts in widening participation as well as the influence of peers on HE participation. She also shares her own journey into HE to positively encourage young people to consider stepping out of their comfort zone and think about HE as an option.

## Gail Nicholls

Royal College of  
General Practitioners

Dr Gail Nicholls is a GP and Director of Admissions at Leeds School of Medicine. She has spearheaded a widening access agenda within medicine and primary care over recent years - one that has fundamentally shaped the way organisations such as the Royal College of General Practitioners and Medical Schools Council, alongside others, consider and approach widening access to medicine. Gail has not only offered countless opportunities for widening participation students to gain access and exposure to primary care through targeted work experience interventions throughout Yorkshire, but since 2016, she has led an expansion of her successful programme across a staggering 20 medical schools across the UK. The programme has now had 1000 participants, all of which have experienced high-quality work experience using the model that Gail created.

# NEON Higher Education Institution of the Year Award

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## City, University of London

Commitment to empowering underrepresented learners to access and succeed in HE is articulated through City's institutional values of Community, Diversity and Inclusion, and is lived through the work undertaken across the institution to support their diverse student population at every stage of their educational journey. City delivers targeted programmes to support those most in need alongside embedded support for WP across the institution. With a high proportion of commuter students, the physical space has been designed to welcome and support students to stay on campus and feel part of the community, such as inclusive changing facilities at CitySport to support trans students and a multi-faith space providing a space for prayer, reflection and guidance. With nearly 70% of their UK/UG population classified as WP, the highest proportion of commuter students in the country and over 50% of the students coming from BAME background – City tailors its institutional approach to work with the unique needs of their students, to maximise their potential and ensure success.

## The University of Nottingham

The University of Nottingham has been at the forefront of innovation in widening access working with primary school students and families before most other institutions, and a lot of their work has now been recognised as best practice. They offer comprehensive bursary packages in addition to outreach activities. Between 2004 and 2014 the proportion of low-income students increased by nearly ten percentage points, one of the most improved universities in the Russell Group. The University's performance against HESA widening participation performance indicators has improved consistently: intake from state schools has risen from 69.4% in 2008–9 to 79.2% in 2015–16, well above the Russell Group average. The University's programme of outreach, including long-running partnerships with IntoUniversity, the Sutton Trust and The Brilliant Club, provide support for students from a wide range of ages and demographics. The University has also worked with the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring at Durham University to develop an innovative evaluation framework.

## University of Winchester

In 2017/18, the University of Winchester recorded over 6,000 interventions with targeted schools and organisations including school outreach and on-campus events. Project evaluations of raising attainment in reading literacy and GCSE English demonstrated progress in academic confidence. The University continues to expand its activity based on national research, introducing support for estranged students, leading innovative research and practice in the value of degree apprenticeships, and introducing family events and residential activities for forced migrants. Last year, the University led a project to establish a social mobility pipeline to degree apprenticeships. The project enhanced key influencers and young people's knowledge and understanding of progression routes via a series of resources, CPD opportunities and outreach events drawing upon the experiences of current students to dispel the myths associated with applying to and studying for a degree apprenticeship. The University of Winchester is a values driven university with widening participation, increased access, retention and achievement of students at the heart of its mission.

# NEON Summer Symposium 2019

## The third age of widening access

Thursday 13 & Friday 14 June  
Lancaster University

The **NEON Summer Symposium** not only offers two days of stimulating keynotes, presentations and discussions - it is also an invaluable opportunity for widening access professionals, careers advisors, student support specialists, policy analysts and academics to engage with each other to discuss best practice and drive forward the social mobility agenda that we are all dedicated to.

### During the two days delegates will have the opportunity to:

- Hear from, and interact with, a range of excellent keynote speakers from across the educational sector.
- Learn where we are now in access and participation in higher education, where we have been and where we want to go.
- Participate in NEON's Laboratory Sessions. This year will include sessions delivered by UCAS, Prisoners' Education Trust, Pearson, AGCAS Social Mobility Task Group, LEAPS and Spectra First.
- Choose from over 27 Paper Sessions - each looks to address important issues around widening access.
- Network and share practice with colleagues working within widening access.
- Influence the future direction of the National Education Opportunities Network and help us deliver the services which best serve our members.

**Check NEON Events for more information:**  
[educationopportunities.co.uk/neon-events](http://educationopportunities.co.uk/neon-events)

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