



National Education Opportunities Network (NEON)

Trustees Annual Report

For the year ending 31st July 2025

Objectives and Activities

Summary of the purposes of the charity as set out in its governing document

NEON works for the public benefit to promote routes into, and success in, higher education in such ways as the charity trustees think fit, including by:

1. Supporting organisations to work with all learners, especially those from under-represented groups.
2. Identifying, and researching, barriers to higher education and sharing potential solutions.

Summary of the main activities in relation to those purposes for the public benefit, in particular, the activities, projects or services identified in the accounts.

NEON believes that access to, and success in higher education should not be related to social background but based on ability and willingness to participate. In order to achieve this we support our members to both identify and address challenges that may both stop learners being able to enter, or succeed within higher education through a comprehensive events programme, research reports and a weekly newsletter.

Over the period of this report NEON has held 32 events. The aim of these events is to help educational practitioners understand barriers that learners face, in terms of gaining entry to, and achieving success within, higher education, and to learn from policy, research and practice to help inform their own strategies and activities with learners. The events also present the opportunity for attendees to network, and engage with, other attendees, make connections and share practice. These events are open to all with the majority of them being held online. This year also saw the development of two new multi-part courses, “Breaking Ground”, aimed at early career practitioners, and “Leading the Way”, aimed at practitioners who either recently took up management roles or those aspiring to management.

In addition to these events NEON offers its members the opportunity to attend themed, online working group meetings based around key topics of concern. These include:

- Access and outreach for disabled learners;
- Addressing differential outcomes for ethnically diverse learners;
- Establishing evidence and measuring impact;
- Estranged students;
- Mature learners;
- Mentoring to widen access;
- Primary age outreach;
- Supporting access, success and progression for vocational learners;
- Widening participation in postgraduate study.

The meetings give attendees the space to consider these topics, discuss and debate current approaches and decide upon possible future actions to address challenges that arise. They work on producing resources and examples of practice that are made available to all NEON members. Outcomes of the meetings are shared online, being available to any person accessing our website. We also introduced a new working group to address the issue of estranged students.

Each year NEON holds an annual conference, the NEON Summer Symposium, offering those concerned with widening access the opportunity to hear from key policy makers, stakeholders and other practitioners about the importance of widening access. This two-day event is the largest UK conference dealing with these issues.

Statement confirming whether the trustees have had regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit

The trustees confirm that they have had due regard to the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit, both in agreeing NEON's aims and objectives, and in planning all future activities. Our work focuses upon equitable access to higher education for all learners who are able to benefit from it and we work closely with other organisations within the Education sector in order to achieve this.

Summary of the main achievements of the charity, identifying the difference the charity's work has made to the circumstances of its beneficiaries and any wider benefits to society as a whole.

It has been a successful and eventful year, against a background of financial strain in higher education which has impacted particularly heavily on activity to promote access and participation in HE.

As always, our main focus was upon meetings. In all we ran 16 staff development events and 15 working groups meetings. Of the meetings, eight were Access and Success Academies and they attracted 173 online attendees. An innovation this year was the NEON Professional Courses with an attendance of 31 online at two courses.

The Summer Symposium at the University of Salford, on 'My Hometown: The importance of place in widening access and student success,' was very successful with 207 delegates present. Another highlight was the launch event for the World Access to Higher Education Network with 60 in person attendees at Ruskin College, Oxford and 1042 online all over the world. Some six other events attracted 361 attendees, either online or in person. These included two NEON Awards Ceremonies at the Palace of Westminster, as the 2024 Ceremony had to be postponed because of the General Election. Unfortunately, a proposed Winter Online Conference and two NEON Summits had to be cancelled because of lack of interest.

Members have indicated that they prefer meetings with a greater focus on successful case studies and more opportunity to interact and engage with other members. We are, therefore, trialling a new series of NEON Supporting Practice Events in the coming year.

The many NEON Working Groups have continued to take forward the agenda in specific areas of access practice. Nine Groups met during the year, in total there were 15 meetings with 324 participants.

We launched a report on 'Aim Higher, 21 Years On, Opportunity and the Future of Partnership'. The WAHEN Launch Meeting in December also saw the launch of the UNESCO 'Right to Higher Education' report.

Throughout the year we have advocated, along with others and led by the Protect Student Choice campaign, for the preservation of ladders of progression into higher education, specifically BTEC programmes. After an initial rebuff from HM Government, it now seems that there is now a greater understanding in Whitehall of the need for a diversity of student choice rather than a binary divide between 'A' or 'T' levels only.

It is now clear that the money-saving reorganisations and redundancies that many higher education providers are experiencing is hitting widening access teams severely. In response to concerns communicated to us, we have surveyed members on the impact of cuts. Over 55% of respondents expect to see both budgets and staffing cut in the next year. We are seeking to bring this challenge to access work to the attention of policy makers.

We continue to support the World Access to Higher Education Network (WAHEN) which is now a UWL project. Both the current NEON Director and Chair remain on the Board of WAHEN.

Given the change in content now appearing on X (formerly Twitter), we have decided to refocus our social media efforts onto LinkedIn where we now have 622 followers an increase of 125.

Mention was made earlier of the financial pressures on access budgets and this would seem to be the reason why 13 members have not renewed their membership. Total membership remains at a relatively high level, 130, of which 89 are universities. That total includes 24 Premium members and we are considering the

nature of the membership offer. Our review of membership benefits suggests that we are still offering outstanding value, but we do need to be responsive to the changing situation in higher education.

As a consequence of our continuing strong membership figures, successful Summer Symposium and training activities, as well as a prudent approach to expenditure, we were able to make a small surplus of £15,071 after total expenditure of £219,286. Our reserves remain strong and in line with our agreed reserves policy. The receipts and payments accounts for 2024/25 show a deficit of £49,929, this was due to a payment of £66,500 made to the University of West London for hosting costs from previous years.

We were pleased to finally sign an agreement with the University of West London who act as our hosts. UWL act as employers for our staff.

We have seen some significant staffing changes this year. Most notably Professor Graeme Atherton, the founding Director of NEON, resigned in February 2025 to become Vice Principal of Ruskin College and Associate PVC Regional Engagement at UWL. We owe Graeme a great debt of gratitude and are pleased that he will remain a close supporter of NEON. The Trustees have appointed Martin Webster, previously Deputy Director, as Director.

Following other resignations we were delighted to re-engage Maria-Anna Petrou as Membership and Finance Officer. We are most grateful to the staff and members of NEON for all their help and support in such a significant year for the charity.

Review of the charity's financial position at the end of the period

The charity is in a strong position given this is the third year of its operation as a charity and has a financial surplus.

Statement explaining the policy for holding reserves stating why they are held

The trustee's policy is to build up unreserved funds that amount to six month's running costs, which amounts to £70,000 to allow for adverse economic conditions and other potential threats, safeguarding NEON's long-term future as well as a further £25k for planned expenditure in the next year and a payment to University of West London for staff costs of £43,371.03 relating to 2024/25.

Amount of reserves held

£ 95,000

Details of fund materially in deficit

There are no funds in deficit.

Explanation of any uncertainties about the charity continuing as a going concern

There are no concerns about NEON continuing as a going concern.

The charity's principal sources of funds (including any fundraising)

- Income from NEON events.
- Membership subscriptions.

A description of the principal risks facing the charity

- A fall in membership subscriptions.
- Reduced income from events programme.
- Changes in government policy regarding participation in higher education.
- The loss of key staff from NEON.

Structure, Governance and Management

Description of charity's trusts:

- **Type of governing document** – Constitution
- **How is the charity constituted?** - Charitable Incorporated Organisation
- **Trustee selection methods including details of any constitutional provisions e.g. election to post or name of any person or body entitled to appoint one or more trustees** - Election by members with option to co-opt (with regard for experience and skills)
- **Policies and procedures adopted for the induction and training of trustees** - New trustees receive full information about the workings of NEON
- **Other** - Before becoming a CIO NEON was based at the University of West London. Since becoming a CIO the University continues to employ NEON staff.

Reference and Administrative details

Charity name	National Education Opportunities Network
Other name the charity uses	NEON
Registered charity number	1199280
Charity's principal address	c/o University of West London St Mary's Road Ealing London W5 5RF

Names of the charity trustees who manage the charity

Trustee name	Office (if any)	Dates acted if not for whole year
Margaret Greenfields		31.08.2024 - 26.11.2024
Hannah Merry		
Stacey Mottershaw		
Les Ebdon	Chair	
Peter John		
Karen Lipsedge		
Anna Wooley		
Lynne Downey		

Name of chief executive or names of senior staff members (Optional information)

Director name: Martin Webster

Declarations

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees



Full name: Leslie Colin Ebdon
Position: Chair
Date: 6th May 2026



CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

National Education Opportunities Network

No - 1199280

Receipts and payments accounts

CC16a

For the period
from

Period start date
1/8/2024

To

Period end date
7/31/2025

Section A Receipts and payments

	Unrestricted funds to the nearest £	Restricted funds to the nearest £	Endowment funds to the nearest £	Total funds to the nearest £	Last year to the nearest £
A1 Receipts					
Events	109,019	-	-	109,019	100,884
Projects	64,983	-	-	64,983	35,723
Membership	59,135	-	-	59,135	50,567
Other income	872	-	-	872	267
Bank interest	348	-	-	348	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total (Gross income for AR)	234,357	-	-	234,357	187,442
A2 Asset and investment sales, (see table).					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total receipts	234,357	-	-	234,357	N/A
A3 Payments					
Staffing	114,685	-	-	114,685	32,650
Events	32,876	-	-	32,876	54,244
Consultancy	9,283	-	-	9,283	6,576
Expenses	75,521	-	-	75,521	5,890
Research & Projects	51,004	-	-	51,004	-
Publications	916	-	-	916	847
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	284,286	-	-	284,286	100,208
A4 Asset and investment purchases, (see table)					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total payments	284,286	-	-	284,286	100,208
Net of receipts/(payments)	- 49,929	-	-	- 49,929	33,552
A5 Transfers between funds	-	-	-	-	-
A6 Cash funds last year end	-	-	-	-	-
Cash funds this year end	186,520	-	-	186,520	N/A

Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period

Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B1 Cash funds	Balance at the end of July 2025	186,520	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
	Total cash funds	186,520	-	-
	(agree balances with receipts and payments account(s))	OK	OK	OK


	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B2 Other monetary assets		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-

	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
B3 Investment assets			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-

	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
B4 Assets retained for the charity's own use			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-

	Details	Fund to which liability relates	Amount due (optional)	When due (optional)
B5 Liabilities			-	
			-	
			-	
			-	
			-	

Signed by one or two trustees on behalf of all the trustees

Signature	Print Name	Date of approval
	Leslie Colin Ebdon	19th March 2026

CCXX R2 accounts (SS)

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**Report to the trustees/
members of**

Charity Name

NEON

**On accounts for the
year ended**

31st July 2025

Set out on pages

7 and 8

(remember to include the page numbers of additional sheets)

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended **31/07/2025/ MM / YYYY**.

**Responsibilities and
basis of report**

As the charity trustees, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent examiner's statement


I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention (other than that disclosed below *) in connection with the examination which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- the accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Act; or
- the accounts did not accord with the accounting records; or
- the accounts did not comply with the applicable requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair' view which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

** Please delete the words in the brackets if they do not apply.*

Signed:



Name: Lynn Hill

Relevant professional qualification(s) or body (if any):

Fellow of Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (FCMA)

Address: 222 Moss Delph Lane

Ormskirk

L39 5BJ

Section B

Disclosure

Only complete if the examiner needs to highlight matters of concern (see CC32, Independent examination of charity accounts: directions and guidance for examiners).

Give here details of any items that the examiner wishes to disclose.

None