



Staff and graduates from the Certificate of Public Involvement and Co-Production modules

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First cohort graduate from pioneering programme at Northumbria University

Learners from a pioneering and inclusive programme recording the importance of public involvement in research were among thousands of students celebrating the end of their studies at Northumbria University's summer graduation ceremonies.

Almost 20 individuals with experience of homelessness, mental health trauma and the criminal justice system were given the opportunity to study towards a formal qualification at Northumbria while sharing their life

experiences to help inform ongoing academic research.

After studying on two separate modules taught at Northumbria's [Coach Lane Campus](#) over the past two years, a number of the students completed a [Certificate of Public Involvement and Co-Production in Research](#), opening the door to a future many of them could never have imagined.



Tara Scott

For 52-year-old Tara Scott from Carlisle, the opportunity to study at the University while working with academics as a peer researcher, has given her the qualifications and experience needed to secure a place on her first undergraduate degree programme. In September she will begin studying a BSc (Hons) in Psychology with Counselling and Psychotherapy in her home city.

“I had never ever considered university before, I was always keen to finish school to be able to bring in a wage, and in the late 80s early 90s when I finished school at 16, university was not even mentioned to me. It felt to me back then that only kids from rich families went to university and I was certainly very far removed from being one of those,” explained Tara, who works as a Community Engagement Coordinator for the charity, Mind. “Now here I am, nearly 40 years after first leaving the school system, with little and fractured education, ready with my new pencil case and bag waiting for the September term to begin.”

Tara's achievement marks a new chapter in her life. Following her own mental health struggles eight years ago, she found herself admitted to hospital with a diagnosis of psychotic depression. During her recovery she began volunteering with Mind and, using her own experience, now works to support and improve the lives of others.

"I'm really proud of how far I've come," she said. "I'd never set foot inside a university and my experience at Northumbria has really changed my perception. I was made to feel at ease, and significantly equal. I was encouraged to be curious and free to express myself, which really boosted my confidence."



Terry Lappin

Terry Lappin from Newcastle is another of the recent graduates who was able to complete the modules and says he felt an overwhelming sense of pride when wearing the gown and mortarboard for graduation.

The 38-year-old, who recalled being excluded from school at the age of 14, was an aspiring young footballer and now hopes to continue to pursue his interest in the sport through future research projects.

He explained: "I didn't know it when I was at school, but I have ADHD, so was always the token class clown and found myself getting into trouble all the

time. By the time I was 17, I'd fallen in with the wrong crowd and went to prison for four and a half years. That was a big wake-up call for me."

Life continued to be a struggle when Terry tried to rebuild as a young adult and he found himself homeless, spending eight months living on the streets. "I've been lucky and have had support to turn things around. I never thought for a moment university would be for me, but I've done it and coming to Northumbria has really changed things for me. I've shocked myself! If only my teachers could see me now."

[Toby Brandon, Professor in Mental Health and Disability at Northumbria University](#), is one of the teaching staff involved with in the Certificate of Public Involvement and Co-Production in Research modules and has been working with the cohort of recent graduates since 2023.

He explained: "A key part of our University Strategy at Northumbria is the ambition to support students from all backgrounds to be empowered by education tailored to their lived experience.

"These modules explore the reality and theory behind the increasing involvement of members of the public in the co-production of research and I'm proud that we're able to give back to people who are sharing their significant knowledge and experience with us by giving them the space and support to come along and learn for themselves.

"It's important for our social mission as a university that we have found this route to flip the traditional narrative of who is the researcher (expert) and who is the researched (non-expert). We also recognise the impact a university education can have on positively shifting identities for someone who has been labelled as a "patient" or "unemployed" for a large part of their life to become a student, graduate or even a paid researcher.

"We are all immensely proud to welcome our first cohort of graduates from these modules to collect their Certificates and celebrate their achievements at our graduation ceremonies."

The Certificate of Public Involvement and Co-Production in Research study pathway is the foundation of a larger research collaboration, [The Lived Experience Academy](#) that aims to redefine the role of lived experience in

health and social care research. At the heart of which is Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust (CNTW), a leading provider of mental health and disability services, partnered with Northumbria University, Gateshead Council, Durham University and Newcastle-based independent mental health charity, ReCoCo.

Funded by the [National Institute for Health Research \(NIHR\)'s Programme Development Grant](#), the Lived Experience Academy project aims to examine the impact of experience-led research, as well as the support people with lived experience require to develop their research skills. Additionally, it is hoped that in time people with lived experience will be empowered and supported to write and lead their own research proposals.

Northumbria University is dedicated to reducing health and social inequalities, contributing to the regional and national workforce and improving social, economic and health outcomes for the most marginalised in society. Through its new [Centre for Health and Social Equity](#), known as CHASE, researchers will be delivering world-leading health and social equity research and creating innovative, evidence-based policies and data-driven solutions to bring impactful change across the region, the UK and globally.

UNIVERSITY OF THE YEAR 2022 (Times Higher Education Awards)

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Two thirds of Northumbria's undergraduate students come from the North East region and go into employment in the region when they graduate, demonstrating Northumbria's significant contribution to social mobility and levelling up in the North East of England.

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