Northumbria University NEWCASTLE

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North East universities collaborate to improve support for care-experienced people

The five universities across the North East have become the first regional Higher Education partnership to collaboratively sign up to the Care Leaver Covenant.

The Care Leaver Covenant is a national inclusion programme that supports care leavers aged 16-25 to live independently. It aims to create meaningful opportunities in five key areas including education and employment and supports care leavers to access those opportunities.

Northumbria, Durham, Newcastle, Sunderland and Teesside – who together form the North East Raising Aspiration Partnership (NERAP) – have committed to offering support that is consistent at each institution, so all care-experienced students get the same access to support throughout their higher education journey.

As part of this commitment, NERAP have also created a new intensive programme of activities for care-experienced students in years 7 – 13, Choices Together, to support young people to think about their futures and how higher education can help them reach their goals.

Care-experienced students currently form only 1.6% of all applications to higher education. A recent UCAS report shows that nationally, 60% of students who have spent time in care have high hopes about going to university or college, yet received no specific guidance at school or college about applying to higher education tailored to their needs. This is despite the fact that mechanisms such as financial bursaries, year-round accommodation, and mental health and disability support could make a difference to their decision.

NERAP's commitment will provide this assistance and ensure that care-experienced young people in the North East and those supporting them, have all of the information they need.

Professor Graham Wynn, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) at Northumbria University, said: "Northumbria University is very proud to be part of NERAP and our collective commitment to the Care Leavers Covenant. Working in partnership with our care-experienced students, we will develop a framework of guaranteed support that will provide greater equity of access to our region's universities and a strong platform for success in their studies, future careers and life ambitions."

Natalie Latham, Head of Education Partnerships at the Care Leaver Covenant said: "We are hugely grateful to NERAP and the five partner institutions for leading the way in offering a guaranteed consistent level of support to care-experienced students. By adopting this approach, learners will get the right help to access university and will be confident that whichever choice they make in the region, they will be well supported."

Wendy Price OBE, Head of Widening Access and Participation, University of

Sunderland, and Chair of the NERAP Regional Care-Experienced Student Steering Group, said: "This work means that care-experienced leavers in our region are supported throughout the entire lifecycle from school to college, to university and beyond.

"By engaging directly with our current care-experienced students, and the staff across our region who support them, we have created a support framework designed to help students to thrive at university."

Established in 2011, NERAP is a long-standing collaboration of the five universities in the region who fund and collaborate on pre-16 outreach activity. This includes joint visits to schools to highlight the higher education opportunities in the region, and specific targeted work to support care experienced students and young carers. Led by Newcastle University, the partnership is a core element of each institution's work to support young people who have the potential to go to university regardless of their background.

Further information can be found on the Regional Care Leaver Covenant website or by emailing info@nerap.ac.uk

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