

A mini guide to UNIVERSITY IN THE NORTH EAST: **CARE-EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE**

WWW.NERAP.AC.UK



NORTH EAST
RAISING ASPIRATION
PARTNERSHIP



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide has been designed to give you the best start when thinking about going to university as a care-experienced young person. Throughout this guide you will find information about each of our Partner universities, as well as some top tips on all aspects of student life.

For parents, carers and teachers: this guide will provide further information on how you can support your young person into higher education. It will share important things to consider when looking at future careers and university courses, as well as providing tips on how to discuss futures with care-experienced backgrounds.

For young people: this guide has been designed for you! It contains some important information for you to know when thinking about higher education. But it does not include everything you need to know - not by a long shot! (We didn't want to make you read a whole novel.) So, couple this booklet alongside your own research when thinking about your future career, head out to university open days, visit their websites, and speak to your parents/carers and teachers about what you want to do next. They have some amazing information to share with you and they can help make what seems like a big next step seem that little bit smaller!

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NERAP

supporting you
through your
educational
journey

WHAT IS NERAP?

The North East Raising Aspiration Partnership is a collaboration of the region's five universities; working together to ensure every young person has the opportunity to make informed decisions about higher education.

As a Partnership, we deliver sessions in schools to provide free and impartial advice about higher education and deliver programmes of activity to groups of young people who are currently under-represented at university.

Our regional universities offer a wide range of opportunities for students to support higher education decision making. Details of all events along with key information for students can be found by visiting www.nerap.ac.uk

OUR HIGHER EDUCATION AMBASSADORS

You may have already met some of our Higher Education Ambassadors. They are all recent graduates of our Partner universities and are fully trained to offer information and advice about higher education opportunities. They regularly visit schools in the region to deliver talks on student life, choosing the right course, applying to university and much more. If you meet them at your school or on one of our programmes, make sure to ask them about their time at university - they loved it so much that they don't want to leave!



**NORTH EAST
RAISING ASPIRATION
PARTNERSHIP**

'Working together to engage, inform and inspire'



What is **CHOICES TOGETHER?**

Choices Together is the perfect opportunity to discover all about being a university student and what higher education could offer you in the future. It doesn't matter if you haven't thought about college or university – everyone is welcome!

You can join the programme at any point from Year 7 to Year 13 and can work with us throughout your educational journey.

Our Choices Together Representatives are current university students and will be with you every step of the way to help you out, answer questions, and help you to have the best Choices Together experience!

You will have the opportunity to take part in a series of campus sessions at our five North East universities and online sessions via our website.

You can find out much more information about Choices Together including information on how to apply on our website:

www.nerap.ac.uk/students/choices



How do we define a **CARE-EXPERIENCED YOUNG PERSON?**

As a Partnership, we have adopted the broader definition of 'care-experienced,' as this term is inclusive of the range of care settings someone may have experienced. Our definition of care-experienced is someone who, at any stage of their life, and for any length of time, has been in care e.g., looked after by the local authority.

This includes the following:

- spent time in the care of the local authority (e.g., foster care or children's home)
- privately fostered
- 'looked after at home' under a supervision order
- in kinship foster care (where a friend or family member becomes the foster carer).
Kinship care through a formal arrangement, recognised by a Local Authority, and could be prior to a Special Guardianship Order.

Care-experienced young people can already have a lot of the skills that university students will often need. Universities can provide lots of additional support for care-experienced students including financial assistance and academic support. Find more information about specific academic support from our Partner universities on pages 14-19.



**CARE
LEAVER
COVENANT**

What is the **CARE LEAVER COVENANT?**

The five universities in the North East Region (Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside) have developed a collaborative, whole-institution response to support care-experienced students evidenced through the Care Leaver Covenant.

To ensure support for care-experienced students is sustained throughout their higher education journey, all five universities have signed up to the Care Leaver Covenant as a regional Partnership via the existing NERAP Partnership. This means that students who choose to study at any of the university Partners will be guaranteed continued support to access, succeed and progress.

The five universities have committed to developing a level of support that is consistent at each institution. All care-experienced students get the same core access to interventions aligned to the Care Leaver Covenant core outcomes, complemented by additional bespoke support where offered within individual institutions.

For more information about the Care Leaver Covenant and what it means to you, check out our website at:

www.nerap.ac.uk/students/care-leaver-covenant

Choosing your FUTURE PATHWAY

It's never too early to start thinking about your future! Let's explore some of the different pathways that you might take.

Making choices can sometimes feel a bit overwhelming but don't worry, we are here to take you through each stage and give you some tips along the way!

GCSEs: These are the qualifications that you will begin to work towards in Year 10 and 11 - some of you may even start them in Year 9! A GCSE can be completed in many different subjects, but English Literature, English Language, Maths and Science are usually compulsory. There could also be specialist subjects in different schools. It is really important to try your best in these subjects as most employers, colleges and universities will require at least 5 GCSEs, including English and Maths. You will also be able to choose some optional subjects, these will vary depending on what your school offers.



Top tip:

Start researching university courses that interest you to check any specific entry requirements that they might have before choosing your A Levels.

A Levels: A Levels are subject-based qualifications, and you can normally study three or more over two years. They are usually assessed by a series of examinations and offered across a variety of subject areas. Most teaching is done in a classroom, but some subjects may also include practical sessions too. You can study these at many different sixth forms or colleges. Most higher education courses require specific A Levels or combinations of A Levels so this may be a good option to choose if you are considering university. A Levels also allow you to experience a selection of subjects which can be a good way of keeping your options open.



Top tip:

It can help to start thinking about the subjects that you both enjoy and are good at when choosing your optional GCSEs.

T Levels: T Levels are a technical qualification and were introduced in 2020 as a new way to study in further education. They are classroom-based programmes which include an element of learning in the workplace. These will take 2 years to complete, and you will spend 80% in the classroom and 20% on the job. A T Level will be made up of two elements: core and occupational specialism. Core component grades are measured from A*-E while occupational specialism grades will be Pass, Merit, Distinction or Distinction*. These will then be combined to give your overall T Level Grade and will be equivalent in UCAS points to 3 A Levels. You might decide to choose a T Level if you want to continue your studies and know what industry you want to work in, but still aren't sure which occupation. This course will give you a minimum of 315 hours in the workplace across the two years to help build your skills and knowledge about the industry.

BTECs: BTECs are specialist work-related qualifications that combine practical learning with subject and theory content. They tend to be assessed using coursework rather than exams. There are many different courses across 16 sectors that are available from entry level through to professional qualifications at Level 7-from Sport to Childcare! This might be an option that you choose if you are interested in a particular industry but are not yet sure what job you would like to do. BTECs provide you with applied knowledge within your subject area which will build the necessary skills to go straight into employment or progress onto higher education.

Apprenticeships: An apprenticeship allows you to earn while you learn! You'll work as an employee in your chosen industry whilst also studying the theoretical elements from the classroom. Typically, apprentices spend 80% of their time in the workplace and 20% of their time at a college, university, or training provider. There are many different levels of apprenticeships to study. An advanced apprenticeship is equivalent to A levels and you could begin one of these once finishing your GCSEs. Higher and degree apprenticeships allow you to gain a higher education qualification whilst combining work and study. Each different type of apprenticeship will have different entry requirements, so be sure to do your research. Gaining a nationally recognised qualification by completing an apprenticeship can allow you to progress to further study, another apprenticeship or full-time work in your chosen industry.

Always research! Universities generally accept T Levels and BTECs as part of their entry requirements, but it is always best to check directly with each institution. Many courses look at these on an individual basis, so it is always a good idea to do your research before making your choices when you leave school!

What is HE?

Higher Education (HE) enables you to work towards gaining any Level 4 qualification or above such as a degree and is typically taught at a university or a further education college. In the North East, we have so many great providers of higher education that offer a huge variety of subjects to study. We have more information about each of our Partner universities later in the guide.

There are over 52,000 courses to choose from within higher education which can be within a subject you already study or something completely new! Perhaps you have a career path in mind or want to expand your opportunities; higher education can help to unlock your true potential. Each university and course will have specific entry requirements, normally A-levels or equivalent. It's definitely worth doing your research to find the path that suits you.



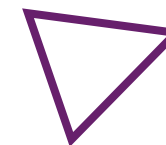
Higher Education in THE NORTH EAST



Durham University offers a wide range of courses and a research informed education, delivered by world-leading experts in outstanding facilities. They offer supportive college communities, a warm welcome to all, excellent student welfare and a fantastic student experience.

Located in the beautiful and historic city of Durham, they are one of the oldest universities in the UK, yet have a modern and forward thinking mindset. With 27 academic departments covering over 200 undergraduate courses as well as postgraduate taught and research degrees, their teaching is research- informed and led by academics, many of whom are world-leading experts in their field.

Durham is a collegiate university, which means your student experience will be distinctive and based in one of their 17 college communities. In fact, their students say that colleges are one of the best aspects of student life at Durham. You are guaranteed a warm welcome.



**Find specific support for
care-experienced students
here**

[mycovenant.org.uk/opportunities/
durham-university/](https://mycovenant.org.uk/opportunities/durham-university/)

[https://www.durham.ac.uk/study/
access-and-participation/support-
for-estranged-care-experienced-
and-early-independent-students-
eace-/](https://www.durham.ac.uk/study/access-and-participation/support-for-estranged-care-experienced-and-early-independent-students-eace/)



Newcastle University is a top 140 global university, advancing knowledge, providing creative solutions and solving global problems. Our strengths include ageing and health, data, cities and place, one planet, culture and creative arts.

Whether you're looking for a course with professional accreditation, or one that offers a work placement or a study abroad year, Newcastle University offers over 185 undergraduate and 270 postgraduate courses to choose from.

The campus is in the heart of Newcastle city centre, a friendly, multicultural and safe city, where one in six people are students.

The University maintains a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, and welcomes more than 29,000 students from 135 countries.

Newcastle University also offers a range of scholarships and bursaries to support students, and ensure higher education remains accessible for all.

With over 180 student-run societies and more than 60 sports clubs to join, students can discover new passions, grow in confidence, and make friendships that will last a lifetime.



Find specific support for care-experienced students here

mycovenant.org.uk/opportunities/newcastle-university/

www.ncl.ac.uk/study/student-life/support-wellbeing/care-leavers/

Northumbria is a research-intensive university that unlocks potential for all, changing lives regionally, nationally, and internationally. It was named Modern University of the Year in the Times Good University Guide 2025.

Northumbria has modern facilities, extensive course choices and is based in a cosmopolitan city with a vibrant student community. With campuses in Newcastle and London, the University attracts staff and students from all over the UK and from over 140 countries worldwide.

Northumbria is ranked in the top 25 in the UK for research power, according to the results of the Research Excellence Framework 2021. The University is also ranked 13th for Career Prospects (Whatuni Student Choice Awards 2025), and with expertise in career support services, is ranked in the top 20 for the number of UK undergraduates who go into skilled jobs (Graduate Outcomes Survey 2022/23 Leavers).

At Northumbria, you'll have the opportunity to work on live projects, take part in a placement year, or study abroad to help shape your CV and make you stand out to future employers. You could find yourself working with companies such as Northumbrian Water, Proctor and Gamble, Nissan, the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary art, or even working on live legal cases while you study. Innovative and entrepreneurial, Northumbria has ranked top 10 for graduate business start-ups in each of the last 16 years – holding top spot in 5 of those years - with business turnover over £160m and over 1,550 jobs created. (Higher Education Business and Communities Interaction (HEBCIS) survey – 2023/24).

Through societies, volunteering, team sports and the alumni society, you can challenge yourself, build your confidence, try new things and meet new people with different ideas and viewpoints.



Northumbria University
NEWCASTLE

In the top 30 for sport in the UK (British Universities & Colleges Sport), Northumbria provides students with access to a wide range of sports and activities at different levels, so there's always an opportunity to take part in challenges, join clubs and leagues, or simply to make friends. Northumbria's Student Life and Wellbeing team are available to support students and Northumbria offers a range of financial support packages to help students during their studies.



Find specific support for care-experienced students here

mycovenant.org.uk/opportunities/northumbria-university/

<https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/study-at-northumbria/support-for-students/student-inclusion-and-success/care-leavers>



The life-changing University of Sunderland has 25,600 students based at their campuses in the north-east, London and Hong Kong and at its global partnerships with learning institutions in 16 countries.

Ranked as a Top 30 University in the Guardian University Guide 2026, they are proud of their long-established commitment to widening participation, world-leading research, and public and private sector collaborations.

Their career-focused courses and facilities are spread across two campuses in Sunderland. City campus is right in the heart of the Sunderland with everything a student could need on their doorstep. The impressive riverside campus, the Sir Tom Cowie campus at St Peter's, sits on the banks of the River Wear and is within easy reach of the city centre and miles of beautiful beaches.

The University prides itself on the support it offers throughout the student journey as well as its multimillion-pound facilities,

award-winning teaching and internationally-recognised research.

The University's Centre for Graduate Prospects (CfGP) works to embed employability in all aspects of the curriculum. It also provides a significant amount of coaching, mentoring and support to students across all year-groups, so graduates are career-ready. Their research and innovation activity has a deep focus on providing solutions in fields as diverse as Artificial Intelligence (AI) in business, diabetes, mental health, pupils in schools with special needs and public art – to name but a few.

Students are at the heart of everything they do, and they're always looking for ways to help you get the most out of campus life. From the moment you apply to the day you graduate, they'll be there to help if you need them.



Based in the heart of Middlesbrough in North East England, Teesside University is a friendly, modern university with over 24,000 students from many different countries and cultures.

The University campus is in the heart of the town-centre, everything you need is only a short walk away. Shops, bars, restaurants and leisure activities are right on the doorstep.

They work with employers and industry to make sure their courses give you the skills, knowledge and experience to succeed. With lots of opportunities to gain experience through placements and internships, you should be ahead of the game when looking for a job.

Teesside University is always working to make it's campus even better. One of the latest additions is Digital Life – a cutting-edge space packed with AI and robotics suites, virtual reality and cybersecurity laboratories, plus studios for animation and visual effects.

It's designed to bring people together, whether they're working on digital projects or hands-on collaborations.

Bios is our state-of-the-art facility at the heart of our campus, home to high-tech laboratories for the sciences and clinical subjects like anatomy, pharmacy, microbiology, chemistry, Earth sciences and food sciences. It's all about giving students access to the best tools and spaces to learn and explore.

The heart of student life at Teesside University is their award-winning Students' Union. It's a warm, welcoming space where students feel part of the community from day one.

Teesside University are Proud to be Times Higher Education's University of the Year 2025, Modern University of the Year 2026 (Daily Mail), and the North East's top uni for student experience with a TEF Gold award.



Find specific support for care-experienced students here

mycovenant.org.uk/opportunities/university-of-sunderland/

www.sunderland.ac.uk/help/care-experienced-support/



Find specific support for care-experienced students here

mycovenant.org.uk/opportunities/teesside-university/

https://www.tees.ac.uk/sections/stud/care_leaver_support.cfm

Applying to HIGHER EDUCATION

If you're a care-experienced young person, ticking the box on your UCAS application can be an important step in getting the support you need to succeed in higher education.

Universities and colleges have a responsibility to support care-experienced students and make sure they have the same opportunities as other students. By ticking the box, you'll be helping them to identify and understand your needs so that they can provide the support you need to succeed. This could include things like financial support, academic support, and pastoral care. It could also include things like year-round accommodation and peer networks.

Ticking the box also helps admissions staff understand your achievements in context, which can lead to contextualised admissions or a guaranteed offer in Scotland. This does not negatively affect your application; instead, it highlights your potential to succeed despite personal circumstances.

Furthermore, many universities and colleges have specific initiatives and supported entry routes for care-experienced students, but these opportunities are often only available to students who have disclosed their caring responsibilities or care experience.



By ticking the box, you'll be giving yourself the opportunity to access these initiatives and receive the support you need to thrive in higher education.

UCAS

STUDENT FINANCE

University is a positive investment into your future. Student Finance England provides funding for your studies and living costs, leaving you to focus on getting the best degree you can!

There are two loans available: a tuition fee loan and a maintenance loan.

TUITION FEE LOAN

Universities can charge up to £9,535* per year for your tuition, but this goes straight from the government to the university, so you don't need to worry about anything! This money contributes to key elements of your course and academic life, as well as core services related to students' wellbeing and experience on campus.

It is only once you've graduated and are earning over £25,000* per year that you'll start making loan repayments. These are small, manageable deductions off your monthly pay, which could be smaller than your current mobile phone bill!

For further information about student finance, visit www.gov.uk/student-finance.

MAINTENANCE LOAN

This loan goes to your bank account and can be used to help you with expenses such as travel, books or rent! You are responsible for budgeting this money every semester to help you with your day to day living costs. The amount of loan and eligibility is based on your household income.



Top tips



You don't need to pay up-front for university



Check university websites to see if you're eligible for any scholarships or bursaries!

*Subject to change. Visit www.gov.uk/student-finance for the most up to date information

As a care-experienced young person, there are many **bursaries** and **scholarships** that you will be eligible to receive. There are also other grants that are based on factors such as academic or sports skills, or the course that you are studying.

Remember to always read the eligibility criteria carefully and make sure you meet all the requirements before applying for any **bursaries** and **scholarships**. Some **bursaries** and **scholarships** are allocated automatically based on household income so be sure to tick the box to confirm you are happy to share the information with the institutions you are applying to. If you're not sure if you meet the criteria for a certain scholarship or bursary, get in contact directly – university staff are always happy to help!



THINGS TO REMEMBER!



Many local authorities provide **bursaries** for care-experienced young people when applying to higher education so don't forget to ask!



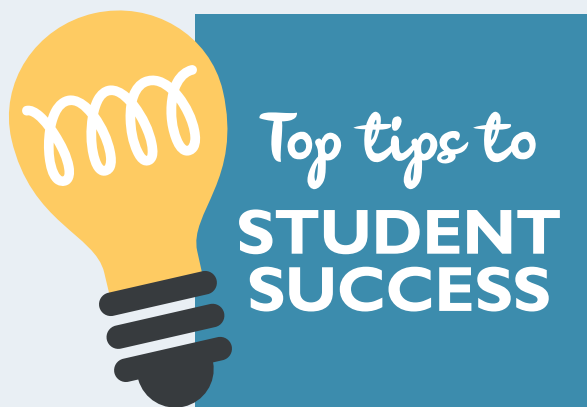
Get your application for **Student Finance England** in as soon as possible to make sure that you get your funding! You don't need to have a confirmed place to start applying for financial support.



Universities are there to support you and want you to achieve! 'Ticking the box' on your UCAS application can help to inform staff of your circumstances, and put specific support in place for you, such as extending deadlines for assignments, or just being there as a listening ear.



Care-experienced young people can apply to Student Finance England as an **independent student**. Your carer/guardian can be elected as the main contact to help you in the application process. You will need to give your 'consent to share' by filling in the form available on their website (linked on page 31).



Organising your time at university is a great tool to support you in maintaining a healthy balance between your studies and your personal life. Here are a few tips for organising your time at university:

- 1 Create a schedule:** Write out a weekly schedule that includes your classes, study time, extracurricular activities, and personal time. Use a calendar or planner to keep track of important deadlines and events.
- 2 Prioritise:** Determine which tasks are most important and need to be completed first. Prioritise your academic work and make sure to leave enough time for studying and completing assignments.
- 3 Break down large tasks:** Break down large projects or assignments into smaller, manageable tasks. This will make them feel less overwhelming and easier to complete (and they can be completed in shorter periods of free time!)
- 4 Use study techniques:** Use effective study techniques such as flashcards, summarising, and note-taking to help you retain information and prepare for exams.

5

Take breaks: Make sure to take breaks and schedule in some downtime to relax and recharge.

6

Be flexible: Be prepared to adjust your schedule as needed. We all know that life can get in the way sometimes, things can come up unexpectedly and sometimes you may need to adapt your schedule to suit it.

7

Use technology: There are many apps, tools and software available to help you manage your time and stay organised, like calendar apps, to-do lists, and study apps. Alternatively, utilise planners and flashcards to create your own reminders and notes - use anything that can help you!

Everyone's schedule is different, so what works for one person may not work for another. It's important to find a schedule that works for you and keep yourself accountable in how you balance your studies. But remember that rest and downtime is all part of making your study time productive.



TRANSITIONING TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Starting university can be an exciting and overwhelming time, especially if you are moving away from home and living independently for the first time. With so many new experiences and responsibilities, it can be challenging to know where to start. Here are some of the key areas that can support you in this transition:

Budgeting: One of the most important aspects of living independently is managing your finances. Make a budget that covers your rent, food, transportation, and other expenses. Stick to your budget as much as possible and look for ways to save money, such as cooking meals at home instead of eating out.

Time Management: University life can be busy, and it can be challenging to balance classes, study, work, and social life. Make a schedule and stick to it, prioritising your responsibilities and ensuring you have enough time for self-care.

Health and Wellness: Taking care of your physical and mental health is critical when living independently. Make sure to exercise regularly, eat a healthy diet, and get enough sleep. Consider seeking help from a campus health centre if you are feeling overwhelmed.

Building Relationships: Join clubs and organisations, attend events, and volunteer to help you meet like-minded people and build positive relationships. On-campus events can also help you in connecting with your roommates and neighbours. You might also consider finding a study group to work on class projects with course mates.

Household Responsibilities: When living independently, you will have your own space, which can be both exciting and overwhelming to think about. Making a cleaning schedule to keep your space tidy can help you avoid feeling overwhelmed.

Safety and Security: There are many features of student living that are designed to keep you safe, from university check-in apps to accommodation live-in reps - everyone is there to make sure you are enjoying your stay and are empowering you to live independently.



Living independently at university can be a rewarding and challenging experience. By following these tips, you can make the transition smoother and ensure that you have a successful and fulfilling university experience.

You can choose to stay somewhere familiar and commute to university, there are many different ways that you can choose to study!



TAKING THE NEXT STEP

So, you've finished our guide, what should you do next?

There is still lots more to read up on when considering university, finance and student life:

- When thinking about courses, the best place to get the correct information is by visiting the university websites directly.
- When thinking about finance, keep up to date with any news surrounding student finance through their webpage, and keep an eye out for any scholarships and bursaries that apply to you!
- And when thinking about student life, talking to current students can be really helpful. Visit university open days, come along to one of our Choices Together events, or look out for our NERAP team, or Partner university representatives at your school!



Here are a few useful websites to get you started:

- NERAP: www.nerap.ac.uk
- Propel: www.propel.org.uk
- Care Leaver Covenant: www.mycovenant.org.uk
- UCAS: www.ucas.com
- Student Finance England: studentfinance.campaign.gov.uk
- The Student Room: www.thestudentroom.co.uk
- The Scholarship Hub: www.thescholarshiphub.org.uk

But remember there's so much more out there, and the NERAP team are here to support you in any way that we can - so if you have a question, get in touch! Find all of our contact details on the back cover!





NORTH EAST RAISING ASPIRATION PARTNERSHIP



Contact us

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Design and print by AlphaGraphics.co.uk