

Supporting online learners

AN INTERVIEW WITH KARYN NASH, NEC'S PASTORAL OFFICER



At NEC we know that studying online can be flexible, exciting and rewarding — but that it also requires commitment, determination and self-management. Which is why we offer our students access to a dedicated Pastoral Officer, who provides wellbeing support to help students stay motivated, overcome obstacles, and get the most from their course.

We spoke with Karyn Nash, NEC's Pastoral Officer to learn more about her role, the services available to NEC students and her top tips for successful online learning.

Hello Karyn, thank you so much for talking to us. Could you start by telling us more about your role as Pastoral Officer at NEC and what it involves?

As a pastoral officer I support all students who need some support. For example they might need help planning and organising their studies, be experiencing anxiety, need study skills support or advice on how to restart their studies after a break. Earlier this year, I completed the NASENCO award. I attend EHCP annual reviews and support students with EHCPs and their parents. My role combines psychology-informed strategies with practical academic coaching to help students build confidence, manage their studies, and take care of their wellbeing. Support can be ongoing for local authority sponsored students with EHCPs or as simple as a single phone call to discuss a problem, and I often work with students studying A levels and preparing for university. Above all, I aim to create a supportive space where every student feels understood and equipped to succeed.

What was your background prior to joining NEC and what led you to working here?

I have worked in education since 2009, spending several years as a teaching assistant before training as a secondary school English teacher. After working as a supply teacher for some time, I also tutored students in GCSE English and taught ESL to Chinese students online. Alongside this, I trained as a mindfulness and wellbeing facilitator. Having previously enrolled on NEC courses myself and being impressed by the materials, I knew the role of pastoral officer was the perfect fit when I saw it advertised. I am a lifelong learner and had experience of both face to face and online learning myself.

Can you tell us a bit more about the Wellbeing for Learning programme at NEC?

Each academic year, I run a six-session Wellbeing for Learning course. This holistic programme draws on my background in education, psychology and wellbeing. It takes students step by step through starting their studies, reducing procrastination, boosting motivation, maintaining wellbeing, revising, and preparing for exams. In the final session, we reflect on the past year and set up for the next.

In your experience, what are the most common challenges students face with online learning and can you share any practical tips to help?

Many students I work with struggle to build regular study habits. They often feel that motivation is their most significant barrier; however, with guidance on setting clear goals, planning their studies, and working consistently, they can make real progress and build confidence.

What support is NEC able to offer students with mental health needs or SEN?

While I'm not a qualified counsellor or therapist, students often find that simply having someone listen helps ease the anxiety they feel around studying. My training and experience in supporting neurodivergent learners, particularly those who are autistic or have ADHD, means I can offer strategies tailored to their needs.

Beyond pastoral care, what other services are available to help students through their studies?

We also have a fantastic Student Support team that guides students with their studies and university applications, as well as a dedicated exams team that makes applying for exams less stressful. Our Exams

Team are specialists in supporting students with access arrangements, ensuring that individual needs are fully understood and met. For students who need more specialist support, we work closely with our partner, Education Allies.

How can parents or carers best support their young person with online learning?

Parents play an important role, too. Ask young people what they need and how they would like to be supported, and reassure them that you are there to help, not to judge. I always welcome contact from parents who would like to understand what support they can provide.

What aspect of your role do you find most rewarding and why?

One of the most rewarding parts of my role is hearing students begin to relax when they create a realistic plan. I enjoy supporting students to enjoy their studies and look forward to the results of their hard work.

And finally, if you could give just one piece of advice to someone thinking about enrolling on an online course, what would it be?

If you're considering enrolling in a course, research it thoroughly. Choose a subject you're interested in and feel confident you can manage, a course that is challenging but achievable. Think about your reasons for studying it - what goal will it help you reach?

Thank you Karyn!