The National Extension College announces new Chair, expanded courses and enhanced digital experience

Tuesday 23 September, 2025

The National Extension College (NEC), a pioneer in distance learning for more than 60 years, has unveiled a series of updates to strengthen its mission of widening access to education for all. The changes include:

- a **new Chair of Trustees**, Vanessa Pittard, and a strengthened strategic leadership team
- a new **Structured GCSE Programme** designed for home-educated students and students requiring more structured support to achieve a GCSE in one-year
- enhancements to NEC's online learning platform, **learn@nec**
- a **redesigned website** (www.nec.ac.uk) with improved accessibility and navigation - ensuring every visitor enjoys a seamless experience
- a refreshed logo and brand identity.

LEADERSHIP: WELCOMING A NEW CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

NEC has announced **Vanessa Pittard** as its new Chair of Trustees. Vanessa is Deputy Chief Executive of MEI, a leading education charity working nationally with schools and colleges to provide students with the best possible maths learning experiences. She brings extensive leadership experience and a track record of working with strategic partners and stakeholders, including government and funders.

NEC Chief Executive Esther Chesterman said:

"We are delighted to welcome Vanessa as our new Chair of Trustees. Her leadership will help guide NEC through our next stage of growth. Our Board has also been strengthened with new members bringing fresh expertise to support innovation, and ensuring that we have the knowledge and skills to meet future challenges and opportunities."

Vanessa Pittard said:

"I'm proud to become Chair of Trustees at the National Extension College. NEC has always championed access to education and opportunity for all. These new initiatives will give more learners a chance to achieve their goals and to get the support that they need."

EXPANDED LEARNING OFFER

New for 2025, NEC has launched eight Structured GCSEs, ideal for home-educated students and those looking for more structured support. The one-year courses come with full academic and pastoral support, expert-led live teaching, tailored feedback, and combine independent learning with the reassurance of regular check-ins, interactive learning tools, and a personalised support network. Subjects include English, Maths, Psychology and Computer Science.

Esther Chesterman said:

"At NEC, the future of learning is flexible and inclusive. We've expanded our course portfolio in response to students' needs, to offer greater choice and enhanced pathways to further education or career-focused plans, and to affirm our commitment to ensuring that every student can achieve their goals."

In addition to the new one-year GCSEs, NEC continues to offer a wider range of GCSEs and A levels, including one-year Structured Fast Track A levels in five subjects, Functional Skills, and vocational qualifications in management, counselling, bookkeeping and teaching.

ENHANCED ONLINE LEARNING PLATFORM

NEC's online learning platform **learn@nec** is where students study, engage with others, and succeed in their learning goals. The platform is being enhanced to create a fully inclusive digital classroom.

Helen Davies, NEC's Online Learning Manager said:

Media:



Related Sectors:

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Related Keywords:

NEC :: Learning :: Support :: Students :: Education :: Online :: Distance :: Flexible :: A-Level :: GCSE :: Learners :: Website :: Structured :: Courses :: Trustees :: Chair ::

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“From improved navigation to features that support students’ diverse learning needs, the changes to learn@nec will ensure that studying at NEC is even more engaging and accessible. Our goal is to create a digital platform that gives learners more choice and greater flexibility to learn.”

NEW WEBSITE AND REFRESHED BRAND

NEC’s refreshed logo and brand identity, considers its heritage whilst reflecting NEC’s innovation, ambition and continued commitment to offering inclusive education for all.

The new website (www.nec.ac.uk) has been developed by Ronins on behalf of NEC with prospective learners and stakeholders clearly in mind and is fully accessible for all visitors. With easy navigation, clear information about courses, finance, student support, and resources for parents, schools and partners all visitors are supported from the very first click.

Esther Chesterman said:

“Our new website has been built for everyone, reflecting who we are today - innovative, student-focused, and committed to making education accessible to all. Our goal is to make every piece of information feel like a helpful conversation with a knowledgeable friend.”

Founder and CEO at Ronins, Anthony Basker said:

“Great projects happen when everyone’s pulling in the same direction. NEC knew exactly what they wanted, a site that opens doors for learners, and that clarity made our job simple. The team was a joy to work with, and together we’ve built something that really reflects who they are.”

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EDITOR NOTES:

About the National Extension College

Established in 1963 as a not-for-profit distance learning provider, the National Extension College (NEC) has a strong, proud heritage in widening access to education. NEC’s aim is to transform lives and open up new possibilities for people of all ages by offering access to essential qualifications like GCSEs and A levels, as well as vocational qualifications in management, business and teaching. NEC’s courses can be studied flexibly, at any time and anywhere and offer each student an exceptional level of support to achieve their future ambitions. NEC is widely recognised as a specialist in online learning and continues to seek out new areas for innovation.

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For more information about this press release, or to arrange to speak to Esther Chesterman, please contact: marketing@nec.ac.uk.

Trustees

Part of The Open School Trust, the National Extension College (NEC) is an educational charity guided by a Board of Trustees, each of whom brings to NEC a unique set of skills and experiences. Together they help to keep NEC at the forefront of online learning. In addition to appointing Vanessa Pittard as Chair, NEC has recently appointed two new trustees, James Tweed and Tim Bennett-Hart to the Board https://www.nec.ac.uk/trustees/.

Structured GCSEs

The eight subjects available as Structured GCSE courses are:

- GCSE Astronomy
- IGCSE Biology
- IGCSE Chemistry
- IGCSE Computer Science
- GCSE English Language
- IGCSE History
- GCSE Maths

- GCSE Psychology

In 2024 NEC was shortlisted for the Learning Technologies Award for Excellence in Learning Design.
More about NEC course design.

Benefits and Features of NEC's new website

Benefits:

- Easier Navigation for all users
- Clear information about courses and supporting services
- Easily enrol online, or speak to an advisor
- Finance options clearly explained
- How it works preview: prospective students can try our Free AI course before they enrol.

Features:

- How it works - explore online distance learning
- Dedicated information and downloads for students, parents, schools/LEAs, partners
- Insights Hub - for blogs, events and student stories
- Meet our tutors, staff and trustees
- Icons to help quickly scan information for relevant content
- Emotive photography - to connect our services and support to the people who use them.
- The website meets a minimum of Level 2.1(AA) of the Web Content Accessibility (WCAG) Guidelines.

The website was developed by Ronins on behalf of NEC.

Company Contact:

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