

1) Name of institution

University of Exeter

2) Name of the initiative

Create Your Future

3) Initiative outline

A timetabled, non credit bearing, compulsory first-year undergraduate employability programme of three weeks’ duration. Engaging some 4,600 students annually through a blend of workshops and independent online learning, this initiative helps students begin career planning early, with sustainability embedded throughout rather than added as a separate topic. Workshops are tailored to be discipline specific.

4) Context/history/need for initiative

Many UG students delay career planning until their second or third year, despite internships, placements and other opportunities often requiring applications early in Year 2. Exeter's Career Zone developed Create Your Future as a large-scale, structured first-year intervention to address this, helping students connect their identity, values and aspirations with labour market realities from the outset of their degree.

5) What happens and how is it assessed

The first year programme consists of two workshops and structured independent learning, totalling 5–7 hours over three weeks. There is a follow-up review process in the second year.

Workshop 1 — The Future of Work and What Employers Want: explores employer priorities, technological change, wellbeing, equality/diversity/inclusion, and sustainability, anchored in students' own values and aspirations. A key activity asks students to rank personal values and reflect on how these may shape career choices. Students then analyse employers that graduates from their discipline have joined, using Graduate Outcomes data, employer websites, news sources, Windo CSR data, and employee review platforms (e.g. Glassdoor) to test whether organisational claims align with independent evidence.

Independent Learning: Between workshops, students complete a structured self-assessment using Exeter's Skills to Thrive framework, identifying strengths, evidencing capabilities, and noting development priorities.

Workshop 2 — How to Build the Career You Want: helps students translate reflection into action through input from careers practitioners, academic employability leads, and student interns, culminating in the preparation of a three-month SMART action plan. A second-year follow-up revisits progress and next steps. Assessment is formative throughout.

6) Green Skills developed or applied

Technical/Occupational: The employer research activity develops research, ICT, and data evaluation skills, including sourcing and critically assessing corporate sustainability data.

Transferable/Green Life Skills: Critical thinking, communication, decision-making, resilience, and adaptability — developed through values-based discussion and employer investigation — alongside participatory skills, interpersonal competence, strategic thinking, and a growth mindset.

Transformative Capacities: Reflexivity, future and anticipatory thinking, working with complexity, and respect for diverse viewpoints. The programme builds broader literacy in sustainability, EDI, and wellbeing as career considerations, promoting personal agency and environmental stewardship.

7) Contributions to leverage points

LP7 (Resilience and values-based futures mindset): Strongest contribution — the programme explicitly uses values reflection and future-oriented thinking to support better present-day decisions.

LP8 (Reporting and transparency): Students develop skills to evaluate and interrogate employer claims against external evidence.

LP9 (Responsible data and technology): The programme embeds discussion of technology and students apply digital tools to critically assess information sources.

Also meaningful contributions to **LP2** (Stakeholder communications) through structured dialogue, and **LP5** (Organisational model innovation) through examination of how organisations embed environmental and social priorities.

8) Impact, successes, challenges

The programme's major success is embedding green skills within a mainstream, scalable employability offer reaching thousands of first-year students annually. Sustainability is consistently the lens students choose most often when investigating employers, suggesting strong engagement.

Challenges include maintaining appropriate impartiality when discussing controversial employers or greenwashing, and addressing the persistent "values-action gap" where some students prioritise salary or employer brand over values alignment. The programme's response is pragmatic: plant seeds, build evaluative capacity, and connect students to ongoing support.

9) Advice for others

Start early and embed green skills within mainstream employability rather than treating them as optional or niche. Use a values-first approach, make content discipline-specific, ground activities in real graduate destinations, and give students tools to critically assess employers using independent evidence. Combining careers staff, academic colleagues, and near-peer student voices makes sustainability, employability, and action planning feel relevant and achievable.