

The SDG Accord

The University and College Sector's Collective Response to the Global Goals



University
of Exeter

Career Zone

CREATE YOUR
FUTURE

Integration of SDGs in

- Institutional governance/strategic level
- SDGs in research
- SDGs in campus operations
- SDGs in curriculum development
- SDGs in student engagement activities
- SDGs into community activities
- SDGs at a whole-institution level

Focus on

- Goal 1 - No poverty
- Goal 2 - Zero hunger
- Goal 3 - Good health and wellbeing
- Goal 4 - Quality education

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- Goal 5 - Gender equality
- Goal 6 - Clean water and sanitation
- Goal 7 - Affordable and clean energy
- Goal 8 - Decent work and economic growth
- Goal 9 - Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- Goal 10 - Reduced inequalities
- Goal 11 - Sustainable cities and communities
- Goal 12 - Responsible consumption and production
- Goal 13 - Climate action
- Goal 14 - Life below water
- Goal 15 - Life on land
- Goal 16 - Peace, justice and strong institutions
- Goal 17 - Partnerships for the goals

Summary:

The University of Exeter has a unique personal and professional development programme that helps first year students plan and prepare for their future after University. **Create Your Future** (CYF) helps all first-year undergraduates (c. 5000) reflect on their motivations, values and goals. This is a five-week programme, which we have closely aligned to the SDGs. From the outset, the relevant SDG logos are included in the introduction to the programme – highlighting how embedded the SDGs are in the programme, this also gives the opportunity to emphasise how and why the SDGs are so important.

CYF is customised to students' disciplines and the stage they are at in their career decision making. Students participate in three face-to-face workshops and work through guided independent activities. **CYF** expands students' understanding of graduate level career options and shows them what employers are looking for. Students learn about the future of work in relation to sustainability, equality, diversity and inclusivity. A core, experiential element, of the second workshop asks students to critically interrogate organisations through the lens of either sustainability, EDI or wellbeing. This aligns with our chosen SDGs, as students explore how organisations operate in a wider context, considering how sustainability, EDI and wellbeing influences (or doesn't influence) practice. The purpose of this activity is to not only build commercial awareness, but also facilitates consideration of how the themes of the SDGs might impact career decision making.

The programme concludes with some practical next steps including signposting to the support that is most relevant to each participant and the development personalised action plans. Students are encouraged to work through this personal plan throughout their time at the University and upon graduation.

"It personally helped me focus on what I really want to do in the future and motivated me" [student].

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Outline the 3 key benefits of integrating this theme:

1. All students engage with the sustainability agenda, both formally and informally, and take this learning with them whether they enter a career that is specific to sustainability or another sector.

Our ambition is that we support our students in becoming global citizens contributing to a sustainable, healthy, and socially just society.

2. All students are introduced to the SDGs and specifically, how the learning from this programme relates to them and the organisations they might work for or with in the future. We empower participants to critically engage with the SDGs in relation to the fourth industrial revolution, and consider how the SDGs, and students can contribute to a better world, with a focus on employability and the future of work.

3. Students are signposted to specific sustainability activities that they can engage with to develop their career thinking further. The programme emphasises the impact of sustainability on the world of work, and how this relates to the skills employers are looking for, as such CYF is highly beneficial in supporting students in developing the skills they need in order to contribute to a fairer world.

Outline the barriers or challenges encountered in integrating this theme and how you overcame these:

1. Many students may not think the SDGs apply to them, however, we have carefully pitched the activities to demonstrate how they are relevant to all students in terms of the future of work.

2. Our ambition is to empower all students with knowledge and understanding of the importance and value of the SDGs. Since Create Your Future is timetabled for all students, readiness to engage with the SDGs can be mixed. We have been thoughtful in how we present the value of the SDGs in a meaningful way – whether a student is already familiar and wants to deeply interrogate their impact on the future of work, or if they are only now being introduced to the concept. We do this by threading the SDGs throughout the content – light touch introduction to what the SDGs are, through to interactive, experiential activities relevant to employability.

3. Focussing on the theme of 'Quality Education' at a Russell Group University, can seem a little jarring. However, our intention has always been to use Create Your Future to drive equity of opportunity, from students who may have lower social capital to students who come to university with clear plans and a network beneficial to their goals. We have been considered in how we designed Create Your Future – assuming limited knowledge and experience from the outset, but encouraging participants to share their knowledge with each other, highlighting the benefit of sharing networks and with each other, and staying open minded to the benefits of difference in experience.

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Please outline your conclusions and recommendations to others (Max 200 words):

- CYF helps students develop their employability. It is about developing skills, gaining experiences, utilising social capital – leveraging access to opportunities for students who have limited social capital - and the deployment of these for the benefit of oneself (i.e. gaining a job or further study, and continuing to develop personally and professionally). It is also about generating social, cultural or economic value for others and understanding the benefits to all that this may bring.
- CYF helps students realise what their values and motivations are by helping them explore their attitudes and ambitions.
- This mandatory activity for all first years means that all are introduced to the sustainability agenda and are encouraged to see how they can engage with it. It is deeply embedded in the learning rather than being a bolt-on.
- Tailoring activity to meet the needs of the individual increases level of engagement and satisfaction with the programme.
- The level of demand for students to engage with sustainability specific opportunities suggests that they want to engage more, learn more and make a difference to society.