

## NEON Awards 2024 Nominations

### Category

NEON Widening Access Initiative (Retention and Progression) Award

### Name of project and institution

Exeter Rise, The University of Exeter & upReach

### Brief Description

For the past twelve years, the 'Exeter Rise' programme has enhanced the graduate career prospects of widening participation undergraduates at the University of Exeter. Delivered in partnership with leading social mobility charity upReach, programme participants have access to 1-to-1 coaching throughout their time at university. This support guides them through the complementary employability interventions offered by upReach and the university, supporting their progression into top graduate jobs. To date, 503 undergraduates have been supported through "Exeter Rise". The programme demonstrates the power of long-term partnership-based initiatives and it has been transformative in advancing social mobility and educational equality.

### Why has this project been nominated

The "Progression Gap" faced by undergraduates from lower income backgrounds is a persistent issue. Research shows that a student from a working-class background who achieves a first-class degree from a top university is still less likely to secure an elite job than a more privileged student who achieves a 2.2 (Friedman & Laurison, 2019). In 2012, two University of Exeter graduates from different socio-economic backgrounds experienced this inequality firsthand while applying to graduate roles in professional services. In response, they launched the social mobility charity upReach. With the University of Exeter sponsoring the pilot cohort, they created 'Exeter Rise', a programme of intensive 1-to-1 support for undergraduates from lower income backgrounds. Carefully designed to complement the university's existing careers provision, the programme empowers undergraduates to achieve their full potential. Each 'Exeter Rise' participant is paired with a personal upReach Programme Coordinator, who provides tailored careers coaching throughout their time at university. Through this coaching, they are guided through the various employability opportunities available to them through upReach and Exeter's Career Zone, including CV reviews, mock interviews, skills workshops, mentoring, Insight Days, and exclusive work experience. Beginning with 17 University of Exeter undergraduates in its pilot year, 'Exeter Rise' has gone from strength to strength. Now, 12 years later, 503 Exeter undergraduates have participated in upReach's Rise programme to date, including 150 in 2023/24. After completing the programme, 130 have gone on to secure graduate roles at top employers like KPMG, Bank of America, Clifford Chance and Unilever.

### How long has the project been running

Launched in 2012, this initiative has been running successfully for 12 years and counting. Throughout this time, the programme has continually adapted to support undergraduates in the face of new emerging challenges, including cancelled in-person work experience opportunities from Covid-19. Furthermore, this model of providing complementary 1-to-1 support to universities' in-house careers services has been adopted by 14 other Higher Education Institutions, supporting 2,177 undergraduates on upReach's programmes so far.

### Number of participants for each year of the project's operation

To date, the Exeter Rise programme has supported a total of 503 undergraduates from lower socio-economic backgrounds. There are an additional 130 Associates from Exeter that have been supported on other upReach programmes. Most of these Associates have been supported for three years while they are at University. A breakdown of the number of participants across all programmes in each annual academic cohort is as follows: 2012/13 - pilot of 17 students; 2013/14 - 39 students; 2014/15 - 44 students; 2015/16 - 99 students; 2016/17 - 170 students; 2017/18 - 202 students; 2018/19 - 178 students; 2019/20 - 176 students; 2020/21 - 157 students; 2021/22 - 186 students; 2022/23 - 181 students; 2023/24 - 176 students.

### More details

<https://upreach.org.uk/>

<https://www.exeter.ac.uk/about/vision/successforall/wideningparticipation/>

