



Microgrant Innovation Café 2026



Thursday 28th May 2026
10.30am–12.30pm



University
of Exeter

Programme

Time	Session / Project
10:35 – 10:40	Microgrants introduction
10:40 – 10:50	Sensorial Classrooms
10:50 – 11:00	AI pre-processing to improve marking efficiency for labelled diagrams
11:00 – 11:10	AI Literacy and Responsible Use amongst International Students in Higher Education: A Change Lab Intervention
11:10 – 11:20	Gamification of Risk Management for Project Management Apprentices using a Prototype VR Simulation
11:20 – 11:30	Developing a global classroom module for clinical psychological assessment using virtual avatars
11:30 – 11:40	Scaling the Impact and Reach of 'The Belonging Game' Across the University of Exeter and Beyond
11:40 – 11:50	Regenerative Outdoor-Oriented Teaching (ROOT) for Management Education
11:50 – 12:00	Decolonising Sustainability Education: Co-creating Inclusive, Intercultural and Future-Positive Curricula with Students
12:00 – 12:10	Student-led videos to increase awareness of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN- SDG) for students in Clinical and Biomedical Sciences students.
12:10 – 12:20	Version history software for student assessment: A potential solution to develop AI resilient assessments and to support students' academic writing skills
12:20 – 12:25	Minecraft: Video games for transferable skills
12:25 - 12:30	Video - SDGs in South Africa: A Geography Knowledge Exchange
12:30	Q&A

Project Overview

Scaling the Impact and Reach of 'The Belonging Game' Across the University of Exeter and Beyond

**Dr Iveren Winifred Nyinoh, Dr Shalinee Dhayal, Dr Dominic Wiredu-Boakye,
Prof Musarrat Maisha Reza**

The Belonging Game, developed through the Education Incubator Discovery Grant, supports meaningful conversations and student belonging in group settings. Following successful trials across universities and community settings, the **Belonging Lab showcase** invited University of Exeter (UoE) staff to experience live gameplay and explore its potential to strengthen student belonging. The day also featured a keynote, external speaker, four workshops, & a staff-student panel on belonging.



Outcomes:

- Successful gameplay trials across students, professional services, and academics at the UoE.
- “Train-the-trainer” sessions to develop additional facilitators.

Staff feedback

“Thank you so much for organising this conference. It is really amazing to have this rare opportunity to spotlight the importance of belonging. I am also very excited about using your Belonging Board Game with students — congratulations on this!”

Next steps:

- Deliver a workshop at UoE Penryn campus (14/05), Educator Development Away day (19/05), Academic Leads and Pastoral Mentors: Building Connections event (22/05), National Medical Schools Widening Participation Conference, Glasgow (24/04).
- Deliver a workshop at the Association for the Study of Medical Education conference, Birmingham (30/06).

Contact: www.focusgames.com

Gamification of Risk Management for Project Management Apprentices using a Prototype VR Simulation

Dr Onyekachi Onuoha

This project addresses a long-standing challenge in project management education: learners often struggle to apply risk management theory in practical contexts. During the Incubation phase, the team developed a functional prototype of an AI-supported, scenario-based Risk Management Simulation featuring three realistic project environments: construction, IT and manufacturing. Through branching decision pathways and gamified progression, apprentices can practise risk identification, analysis, response planning, monitoring and issue management. The prototype provides a solid foundation for developing a scalable, multi-device immersive learning ecosystem for use across programmes and learner groups.



Outcomes:

- Functional AI-supported Risk Management Simulation prototype developed.
- Three industry-aligned scenarios created: construction, IT and manufacturing.
- Branching logic and gamified decision-making implemented.
- Initial usability, engagement and learning impact data collected.
- Strong partnerships established with the Immersive Learning Studio and Innovation & Experimentation Team.

Next Steps:

- Integrate the prototype into a multi-device immersive learning environment, with browser-based access and optional VR.
- Implement AI-generated personalised feedback and learning analytics dashboards.
- Conduct wider usability testing across Degree Apprenticeships, MSc modules and CPD.
- Produce sector-facing outputs, including a best-practice guide, workshops and APM/PMI dissemination.

Contact: o.c.onuoha@exeter.ac.uk

Regenerative Outdoor-Oriented Teaching (ROOT) for Management Education

Dr Ruth Cherrington, Dr Laura Colombo, Hollie Kirk, Jenny Tunley Price, Dr Livia Regina Batista, Blessing Jolayemi



ROOT explores how nature-informed, outdoor and place-based pedagogies can reshape management education. The project focuses on developing students' social-ecological systems thinking and regenerative leadership capabilities, while bringing together academics, students and community educators to co-create meaningful learning experiences that challenge business-as-usual assumptions.



Outcomes:

- Enhanced student engagement with sustainability through experiential learning.
- Stronger systems thinking and ability to connect theory with real-world challenges.
- Improved confidence, collaboration and connection to place.
- Deeper sustainability and ecological awareness through reflection and place-based learning.
- Transfer of learning into professional practice, with longer-term impacts reported by alumni.
- Curriculum enhancement through more experiential, regenerative and place-based approaches to management education.
- Scholarly outputs contributing to research on regenerative learning and pedagogical innovation.

Contact: R.Cherrington@exeter.ac.uk

Decolonising Sustainability Education: Co-creating Inclusive, Intercultural and Future-Positive Curricula with Students

Prof Angela Christidis

This project explores how sustainability education within business and finance can become more inclusive, intercultural and critically engaged through student–staff partnership and curriculum co-creation. Working collaboratively with student co-creators, the project used focus groups, story-sharing activities, co-creation workshops and role-play seminars to rethink how sustainability is taught within sustainable finance education. Students contributed directly to redesigning case studies, learning materials and seminar activities, including simulated climate negotiations that encouraged critical reflection on inequality, integrity and decision-making. The project aligns with Responsible Futures and wider institutional priorities around inclusive curriculum design, sustainability and student partnership, while contributing to broader debates around decolonising curricula and epistemic justice in higher education.



Outcomes:

- Increased student engagement and critical reflection on sustainability.
- Greater inclusion of intercultural and Global South perspectives.
- Co-created case studies, role-play activities and inclusive learning resources.
- Enhanced dialogue between students, educators and external sustainability partners.
- Dissemination through conferences, workshops and sector engagement.

Next Steps:

- Continue piloting and evaluating inclusive learning activities across modules.
- Finalise and share the “Decolonising Sustainability Education” toolkit.
- Expand collaboration across disciplines and institutional partnerships.
- Disseminate findings through conferences, publications and education networks.
- Continue embedding student partnership in curriculum design.

Contact: A.C.Christidis@exeter.ac.uk

AI pre-processing to improve marking efficiency for labelled diagrams

Prof Barrie Cooper, Pierre de Bosses, Zeynep Guler

This project explores how AI can help make assessment and feedback more efficient at scale, including: assessment design; marking; and moderation.

Our test module is MTH2011 Linear Algebra, which has nearly 200 students and uses repeatable *competency assessments* to determine if students should pass the module.

As part of their solutions, students are required to draw labelled diagrams. We are particularly interested in whether AI can assist with processing these for more consistent marking, and with possible applications for accessibility.

Outcomes:

- AI assistance reduced development times significantly when generating randomised questions and answers.
- Designing the problems and answers so that AI could help has made the process better and faster for human markers.
- Agentic AI built a moderation platform that helped identify potential errors in the marking, and AI demonstrated real potential to significantly improve the moderation process.
- Anthropic's Claude Opus 4.7+ and Sonnet 4.6+ models are approaching the level of PTA markers for these tasks.
- These models also performed well when converting hand-drawn labelled diagrams into formal representations, such as mermaid code, with potential impacts for accessibility.

Contact: B.Cooper@exeter.ac.uk

Student-led videos to increase awareness of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN- SDG) for students in Clinical and Biomedical Sciences students

Dr Patrick Hamilton, Dr Shelly (Yuktee) Dogra

At the University of Exeter there has been a drive to integrate the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs) into undergraduate degree programmes. However, in Clinical and Biomedical Sciences, we have found that few students recognised the acronym 'SDG', or the links of their modules to sustainability. In this project we attempted to address this challenge by exploring the potential of students as co-creators. Pairs of students have created short videos to highlight the links between their modules and UN-SDGs. These videos will be available for other students to view over the next year.



Outcomes:

- Eleven engaging videos were produced, with styles ranging from animation explainers to direct-to-camera pieces and narrated PowerPoint.
- Topics varied from the impacts of antimicrobial resistance and social inequalities to the impacts of generative artificial intelligence and laboratory practices on the environment.
- In an end-of project focus group, video-makers commented on their appreciation of the importance of SDGs.
- They also highlighted the skills they had developed – particularly in science communication, video production and professional communication.

Next steps:

- In the next academic, the numbers of clicks on the videos and engagement with the videos will be analysed.
- Will students become more how their courses relate to SDGs?

Contact: p.b.hamilton@exeter.ac.uk; y.dogra@exeter.ac.uk

SDGs in South Africa: A Geography Knowledge Exchange

Dr Helena Hastie, Dr Damien Mansell

The SDGs in South Africa project brings together the Universities of Cape Town and Pretoria with Exeter to advance collaborative education. Working through postgraduate students, we mapped the Geography curricula across the three institutions to identify overlapping modules and opportunities for co-teaching and shared resources. Alongside this, we run an inter-university undergraduate challenge, tackling real world energy problems aligned with SDG 7.



Outcomes:

- Online live lectures given across the universities
- Live Q&A with students and researchers
- Modules identified for future collaborations
- Inter-university competition currently running
- Enhanced collaboration across the 3 universities

Next steps:

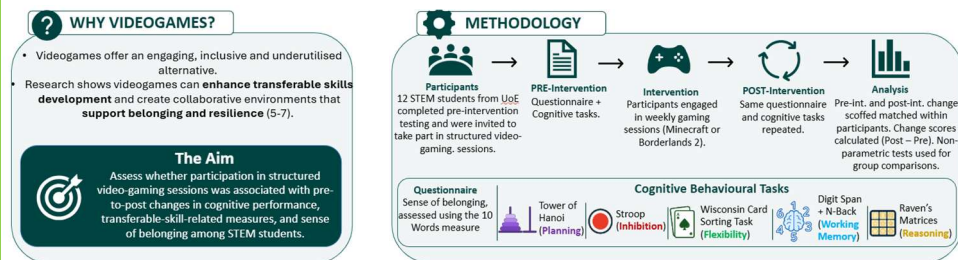
- Competition winners to be announced
- Work with module leads to implement collaborations
- Write up report for future directions

Contact: h.j.hastie@exeter.ac.uk

Minecraft: Video games for transferable skills

Dr Jenny Harris, Dr Federico Palmisani, Angelo Lawand, Bella Rees, Sam Hardwicke, Billy Suriano-Dowlen

Many undergraduate students find developing and applying transferable skills challenging, despite their importance for academic success and employability. Exeter's Curriculum for Change embeds skills into modules and programmes but may risk prioritising skills over disciplinary knowledge. While extracurricular activities such as sports or societies can create a sense of belonging, they may not be accessible or appealing to all students. As a result, opportunities to build connections and transferable skills remain unequal. This project proposes a complementary, extracurricular approach that supports skill development without compromising core academic content.



Outcomes:

- Participants were able to complete the structured video gaming programme, repeated cognitive testing, and belonging questionnaire, supporting the practicality of this approach in a student setting.
- Across the cognitive tasks and sense-of-belonging measure, PRE-to-POST changes were mixed, with no clear significant improvement. Digit Span showed the clearest descriptive cognitive improvement, while belonging scores remained broadly stable overall.

Main Takeaway

Structured videogaming may be a feasible, low-pressure setting for supporting transferable-skill development, but larger controlled studies are needed to clarify its effects on cognition and belonging.

Contact: J.Harris9@exeter.ac.uk

Ensuring robust, authentic, and secure computer science assessment in a world with generative artificial intelligence

Dr David Walker, Dr Abhijit Chatterjee, Dr James Penman

Generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI) provides students with tools that can provide solutions to coursework designed to test one of the key competencies as a computer scientist – the ability to create software by programming. In order to maintain important authentic practical coursework, we must rethink what we ask our students to do, so that we ensure we are assessing work produced by our students and that they have the competencies they need to thrive in the modern computing industry. This project is creating a toolkit of coursework types that are authentic to real - world roles undertaken by computer scientists, are secure against misuse of Gen AI tools, and leverage these tools, that are used industrially, to prepare our students for work.

Outcomes:

We have identified the following initial assessment types, and are providing supporting documentation and training to enable colleagues to deploy them

Log books & in-class assessment: Students are given a series of practical assessments that are undertaken during timetabled sessions. Leveraging the pedagogy from traditional science subjects, students complete a log-book using GitHub that is assessed at the end of term. Students benefit from the mark being awarded based on the best k of M sessions ($k < M$, M is the number of sessions during the term) and receive in-class support during the sessions for formative feedback.

Presentations: Students undertake work that is then presented in the form of (e.g.) a pitch or a presentation of a product or service to a client. The assessment is crafted such that discussion between the students and assessors reveals the depth of understanding of the material presented.

Group work: Students will work in groups to complete software engineering projects that are representative of real-world workplace challenges. They will present regularly in the form of updates with an academic supervisor, and peer assessment will be used to encourage accountability.

Vibe coding: Vibe coding is the development of software using LLMs, and is becoming increasingly prevalent in the software engineering field. It is therefore vital that we train our students in using tools that they will use in the workplace, and by incorporating AI tools into students' education we can demonstrate how they can be used legitimately. This will require the development of new types of task that can be used – e.g. using AI to modify existing systems, generating test frameworks by prompt engineering, understanding system requirements, and so on. To better understand the state-of-the-art industrially, we will engage with our degree apprenticeship students and returning industrial placement students.

Next steps:

- Trial the proposed coursework approaches in 2026/27.
- Collect feedback from staff and students to understand what has worked and what hasn't. Annotate the Sharepoint pages with this information, to build a living repository of guidance.
- Use scheduled activities (e.g. education away days and department meetings) to expand and refine the toolkit.

Contact: D.J.Walker2@exeter.ac.uk

Developing a global classroom module for clinical psychological assessment using virtual avatars

Dr Anke Karl

The project aims to develop an avatar-based MSc module in Clinical Psychology Assessment, combining Tsinghua University's expertise in global classrooms with Exeter University's expertise in clinical psychology. The initiative will bring together students, lecturers and people with lived experience to identify learning needs and inform the development of the module.

Existing teaching materials will be updated and enhanced through the creation of interactive avatar-based content, working closely with Tsinghua's studio. The prototype will then be evaluated through surveys and focus groups with students and lecturers, with feedback used to further refine the module.

Ultimately, the project seeks to create an engaging, accessible and culturally informed global classroom that supports international collaboration and enhances MSc-level teaching in Clinical Psychology Assessment.

Outcomes:

- Stronger stakeholder engagement: Engagement with students, lecturers and clinicians provided valuable perspectives and inspired the extension of the AI-assisted approach, including the use of multiple avatars to create interactive, scenario-based teaching and clinical assessment activities.
- Greater understanding of AI in teaching: The project developed a deeper understanding of the opportunities offered by AI and LLMs, particularly their potential to support the creation of teaching and learning materials.
- New research and collaboration opportunities: The project demonstrated how a concrete prototype can foster global partnerships and create opportunities for further clinical research, as well as refinement and expansion of the prototype.

Next steps

- The team plans to explore external funding opportunities to support the further development and evaluation of the work.

Contact: a.karl@exeter.ac.uk

Version history software for student assessment: A potential solution to develop AI resilient assessments and to support students' academic writing skills

Dr Judith Kleine Staarman, Dr Nicholas Bremner

This project explores how Generative AI (GenAI) is transforming academic writing and assessment, particularly the potential impact of GenAI use on students' development of key academic skills such as reading comprehension, idea development, critical thinking and argumentation.

The project will investigate how version history tools, including Microsoft Word, Google Docs and Process Feedback, can make students' writing processes more visible by capturing how they draft, revise and refine their work. This may provide lecturers with greater insight into student authorship and support more informed assessment and marking, while also encouraging students to reflect on their knowledge, thinking and use of GenAI throughout the writing process.

Working with students and staff in the School of Education, the project will integrate these tools into formative activities across MA Education modules. Student and staff feedback will be gathered to explore their potential to support academic writing and critical engagement with GenAI, strengthen formative assessment, and contribute to more AI-resilient assessment practices.

AI Literacy and Responsible Use amongst International Students in Higher Education: A Change Lab Intervention

Emma Sweeney, Andrea Donahy, Felicia Heard, Matt Lawrence

This project explores approaches to improving AI literacy among university students and faculties using a Change Lab (CL) intervention. Focusing specifically on international students, it examines strategies for responsible AI use in academic settings and seeks to inform how we as an institution can effectively develop AI literacy among international students and faculty members. Through the intervention, we aim to identify strategies that can be used to promote responsible use of generative AI and uphold academic integrity, whilst also leveraging the transformative power of AI.

Outcomes:

- **Clarity and trust:** Students highlighted confusion around permitted AI use across different assessment types, contributing to anxiety and mistrust.
- **Clearer guidance:** Students and staff called for clearer, more consistent AI policies and assessment guidance, supported by practical examples.
- **AI skills and training:** The project identified a need for better AI training for both staff and students, including effective and critical use of AI.
- **Consistency and equity:** Differences in how AI policies are interpreted and applied across disciplines may create inconsistencies and inequalities in assessment.
- **Human agency and learning:** Assessment approaches that encourage students to critically engage with and improve AI-generated content could strengthen critical thinking, creativity and human agency.
- **Community and collaboration:** Participants highlighted the value of sharing AI expertise and experiences across the University.
- **Reconnecting with learning:** The project emphasised rebuilding trust and communication, and focusing on how students develop and apply knowledge rather than simply accessing information through AI.

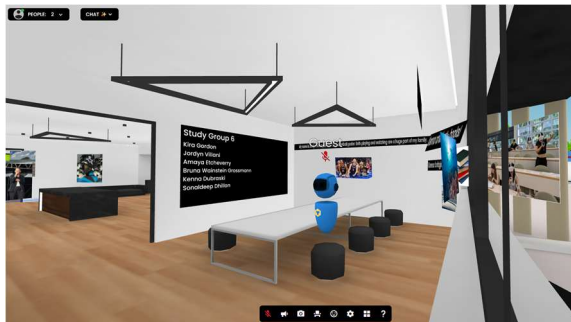
Sensorial Classrooms

Dr Michael James Flexer, Dr Gemma Lucas

Sensorial Classrooms is a collaborative project between the University of Exeter, UNC Chapel Hill and Duke Medical School. The initiative explores health humanities through a module focusing on embodiment, (dis)ability, self-knowledge, and mental and social alienation.

The team co-created the module during a workshop at UNC and Duke in May 2024, developing course content and exploring innovative online immersive platforms. The module incorporates sensory-rich resources designed to enhance virtual learning and create more engaging learning environments.

Following an initial postgraduate pilot, the project was further developed for undergraduate and medical students in 2025. The team has also explored the use of a virtual campus, with interactive spaces representing the partner institutions, to support international and interdisciplinary collaboration.



The project continues to explore opportunities to expand the module, engage additional international partners and develop innovative approaches to teaching, including virtual and immersive technologies. It aims to provide a model for interdisciplinary learning and global collaboration.

Additional project from the 2026 cohort

Inclusion of visually impaired students in practical science laboratories

Dr David Horsell

This project addresses the accessibility of practical science degree modules for visually-impaired students. Could a set of experiments be designed that will ensure such students get the same level of experience of practical laboratory sessions as other students in the same class using exactly the same materials? We will embed this challenge in a Natural Sciences Group Project module where a small team of third-year students will create and test prototype tactile materials (labels, worksheet instructions and orientation information) on both a braille embosser and 3D printer for use in a core first-year undergraduate experiment. This will help us to understand how experiments involving instruments, chemicals and biological materials could work from both a safety and learning perspective for all students.

The work will be overseen by four academics from across Biosciences and Physics who together design experiments for both first- and second-year Natural Sciences undergraduates and are well experienced in developing new ways to make experimental work accessible.

The materials developed by the third-year team will be trialled in the first-year module in early 2026. As part of the group project, engagement both within the wider University and with external organisations will be fostered. Feedback from both the first- and third-year students will be collated to refine the designs and materials for deployment in first- and second-year experiments in later years. Ultimately, we would like the University of Exeter to be a pioneer in offering full science degree courses to students with visual impairment.

Into the Archives: Developing Skills and Experience in Physical Archives

Dr Rebecca Williams

Archives are the bedrock of historical research, and crucial repositories of information used across many other industries. Traditionally, historical research comprised of trips to physical archives to access material documents and other objects. Digitised archives—whilst in many ways transformational resources—still only represent a fraction of existing archival material, and currently carry a large environmental impact because of the energy required to power their servers. Physical archives remain vital for historical and many other forms of research. Yet, undergraduate students often have little exposure to physical archives outside of theoretical discussion in the lecture hall, seminar room, or in readings.

For many history students, practical archival experience begins only at PGT level—a problem that particularly impacts students without resources to independently travel to archives. To enable students to build the ‘future positive skill’ of archival research, this project will develop partnerships with local archives to introduce students to physical archives. We will create a set of teaching materials for use in interactive archive workshops for the level 1 History module ‘Becoming a Historian (Extended)’, with a view to the future expansion of the project into the broader teaching programme at Exeter.



 experimentation-and-innovation



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