University of Exeter | Career Zone

PROFESSIONAL PATHWAYS

Arts, Culture and Heritage

Charity and Development

Marketing

APPLICATIONS LIVE
5 November 2026 - 16 December 2026

EMPLOYER-LED TRAINING
14 - 17 June 2027

PAID 35 HOUR INTERNSHIP
21 June - 2 July 2027

Top Tips for completing your application

We are here to support you to make the best application you can for the Professional Pathways programme, however this is a competitive process. We have provided some guidance below to help you with your application to ensure you give yourself the best opportunity to get through to the assessment centres.

General Guidance

- The application form is a competitive process and anyone not scoring well across all 4 questions, generally won't make it on to the shortlist for the Assessment Centres. It does however depend on the standard across the board.
- Each question has a maximum word count; 250 words for the first 2 questions, and 350 for the second two questions. If you have a word count, we recommend using it!
- You should also note that the higher the word count, the more weighted the scoring for the question, meaning questions with a 350 word count have a higher maximum mark to those of a 250 word count question.
- Spell check, check your English and your grammar so it makes sense. Ask if someone else will proofread your answers or please use the Career Zone. Our Career Zone team are happy to review applications and give advice. It is good practice to get someone to proofread your statement/answers when applying for jobs or programmes like Pathways.
- This is not an academic course, we aren't looking for you to write in an academic way, we want to hear what you have to say about yourself and your career. We are looking to place you in a business environment, and we want you to be able to communicate in an appropriate way if you get a place on the programme.

- Make sure you read the questions thoroughly as we have previously seen some students write answers that aren't relevant and/or didn't address the specific questions that were being asked.

- We understand the use of AI is fairly commonplace now, however we would ask you use this responsibly as we want to understand how you write and communicate. Please see the next section for more advice around this and you may also want to read the Career Zone's best practice guidance on AI at: https://www.exeter.ac.uk/students/careers/research/ai/



Using AI in your application

Please do not use generative AI to write your applications for you! We know that AI is an increasingly useful tool, and we are happy for you to use it to research and help form an answer, but you should not submit wholly AI generated answers.

We want your answers to be personalised, unique, and based on your personal experiences, views and research. AI can help organise your thoughts and generate ideas, especially if you're feeling stuck but please ensure it sounds like how you write, not a regurgitation of a robot.

If you want to use it for prompts/opening sentences or as a starting point, it can be a valuable tool, but you need to be mindful of its limitations:

1. AI tools will assign you values and things it thinks you, and employers, might want to hear – it's not authentic.

2. The language can sound positive to start, but actually frequently it doesn't say anything meaningful.

3. This is particularly true for commercial awareness style questions, i.e. "why do you want to study here?"

4. If you want to use it to run your answers through once you have written them to check grammar and phrasing, it can provide really useful feedback on the text itself (not so much the content!).

5. Be critical of what it gives you back, proofread and rewrite as much as needed. It's not infallible and you will need to fact-check and ensure it matches up with what you actually want to say with your application.

6. Be mindful of sharing too much personal information which will then be incorporated into the AI's dataset.

7. It may provide a generic response meaning your application could use similar phrasing to others – this is something we have seen quite often.

If you want to find further information on this, the Study Skills team also have some good learning around using AI critically and effective prompting. You can find this here: https://libguides.exeter.ac.uk/AI



Specific Question Guidance

Below is some guidance on answering the 4 questions you will be scored on within the application form:

1. Why are you interested in the xxx sector? – Emphasis here is on the 'why' and seeing the passion and motivation behind the 'why'. Also, to score highly on this question, more than just one reason is required within the 250 words.

2. What do you think you will gain from the programme? – We are looking for you to focus on the 3 parts of the programme (training, group project and internship) and consider all 3 along with how they might help your skills, knowledge and experience and how this relates to your future career and general employability. Tell us how you will benefit from completing this programme.

3. What skills and qualities do you possess that demonstrate your suitability for working in the xxx sector? – We are not looking for you to list the skills needed in the sector but rather provide information on your own skills and qualities. One common occurrence is that students outline the experience they have without detailing the particular skills and qualities they have actually gained from this that are transferable to the sector. We would advise not just focusing on a couple of skills as we are looking for a wide variety of skills to be demonstrated. Examples include teamwork,

independence, communication, time management and organisation, IT skills, creativity and demonstrating passion/experience of the sector through your studies, student society activity or relevant work experience. Most importantly we need evidence of how you can show you have these skills/qualities (not just a list of skills & qualities you think you have). Again, evidence could have been from your education, society work, hobbies, extracurricular activities or work experience. Keep reading for more on acquiring skills!

4. This question changes each year and is a business-related question focused on the relevant sector. We are looking for you to have understood the question and have undertaken some research in relation to this. We are looking for you to have understood the challenge or theme in the question and come up with your own ideas, solutions or thoughts.



What is a skill?

In short, a skill can be defined as the ability to do something well or to have expertise in something.
It's useful to consider where we might gain different skills. We learn and acquire skills from a variety of different areas in life. For example:

- Studying, Membership of Clubs and Societies
- Employment, Work Experience and Voluntary Work
- Hobbies
- Personal Lives: for example, travel and family commitments

Skills and Your Degree

During your degree you will gain a lot of skills and experience. Some will be technical (maybe using particular techniques or lab experience), others will be soft skills.
Phrases you might use to highlight these skills could be:

- I've developed a specialist knowledge of topics for example…
- I'm gaining an understanding of the challenges of…, and the ability to deal with theoretical and practical problems e.g. …

- I'm enhancing skills in managing projects and linking the subject-matter to other bodies of knowledge an example of this is...
- I'm employing skills in dealing with complex academic principles and processes such as...



Further Support

Don't forget you can always book a 1:1 appointment via the Career Zone for help and guidance on your Professional Pathways application. We'd also recommend keeping an eye out on My Career Zone for any Effective Application Form workshops taking place and booking onto one of these!

If you have any questions specific to the programme, please get in touch with the team at: professionalpathways@exeter.ac.uk

> I would highly recommend the Professional Pathways programme because it gives students the opportunity to gain meaningful, real-world experience while still at university. It allows you to work on genuine projects, develop transferable skills, build confidence, and understand what it is like to work with an organisation. It is an excellent bridge between academic study and employment, and I would encourage any student to take advantage of the opportunity.
> (Yashika, Pathways to Arts, Culture and Heritage 2026)

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