



Future Zoo: A Case Study

by Future U Evaluation Team

1. Introduction

Future U is a collaborative project bringing together universities, colleges, schools, and businesses from across Lancashire. It is part of the national Office for Students Uni Connect Programme, which supports learners to progress onto Higher Education (HE) in areas where it has been identified HE participation of learners is much lower than expected.

The Future U programme aims to engage, plan, and deliver a diverse range of events and outreach activities, with the aim of supporting learners to identify potential education and career pathways and help overcome any potential barriers which might affect their progression.

As part of its programme, Future U seeks to provide participants with the opportunity to gain specific understanding of key employment sectors and the education insights and potential pathways that might lead to employment in that sector. One of its activities in relation to this sector focus includes the Future Zoo programme which is aimed at participants that might be pursuing a career in Veterinary Science or other related careers such as Conservation, Animal Care, Zoology and Animal Behaviour.

This report shares a case study as a means of evaluating the delivery and impact of the Future Zoo programme as delivered in 2022.

2. The Future U Zoo Programme

The Future Zoo programme is considered a flag ship activity as part of the range of activities supported within the Future U programme. The programme has been delivered in various formats since 2018¹ and has previously evaluated strongly having won a Gold Award in the education category of the 2020 Awards from the [British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums](#).

In 2022, the programme was offered in a pre-16 and post 16 learner format. For the Post 16 format the programme included a two-day visit to a local zoo which provided the participants to learn and gain direct involvement in the care of animals and participating in workshops related to key aspects and issues related to the animal industry. The programme was also enhanced with the opportunity for learners to visit a local specialist land and agricultural college, and with the involvement of two higher education providers who provided a specialist education interaction. One interaction explored concepts of ecology & conservation and was delivered online while another interaction provided the participants with the opportunity for an interactive lab-based session to explore, extract and test their own DNA using modern molecular biological techniques. As part of the delivery of the programme participants were set a project activity whereby, they were asked to develop a small poster resource to capture and present their analysis of a key issue(s) explored on the programme. The programme completed with a graduation session which included time for the participants to share their posters, a couple of

¹ Except in 2020 & 2021 given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

inspiring lectures from some local science and Veterinary experts who shared their career journeys and experience, with the aim that this might show the possibilities in the potential breadth and depth of career opportunities and pathways that might be pursued. An additional aim being that these insights might also encourage the participants with their own personal future aspiration. The participants parents and carers were invited to attend and participate in the graduation celebration.

Information about the purpose of the programme and the application process were sent to schools and colleges being supported through the Future U programme. Appendix 1 indicates the information shared to engage potential applicants. Applications were being particularly sought from young people aged 16-19, were currently studying a level 3 programme and met a widening participation eligibility criterion which included either living in one of the known geographical areas which have lower levels of participation of higher education (HE) progression or was from an underrepresented HE population group such as being care experienced, young carers or BAME² ethnicities amongst other potential groups.

2.1 Participants

Twenty-one applications were received and from these seventeen participants were invited to undertake the programme.

At the graduation event an invitation was given for participants to support an evaluation activity, whereby the intention was to use a case study approach to understand what motivated the participants to apply for a place on the programme, their experience of the programme and to learn of the impact of their participation on their future education and career intentions.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Four participants initially consented and agreed for follow-up contact and to be interviewed. However, despite several attempts one participant did not respond to follow-up so consequently three participants were involved in the evaluation. The intention was to use individual structured interviews as the main data collection method and given the geographical distribution of the participants that these would be virtual. Two participants were interviewed but one of the students, because of personal logistical issues, elected to participate by submitting written responses to the questions used in the interview questionnaire.

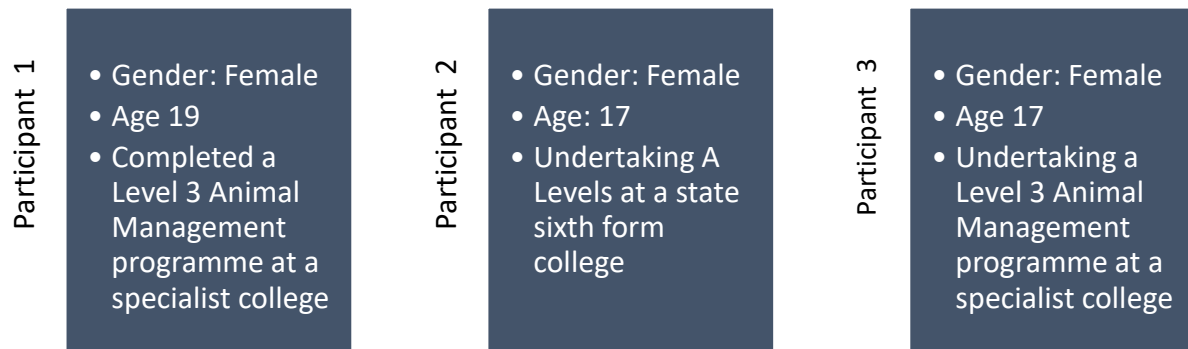
Qualitative data analysis using NVIVO was used, using coding and constant comparison as the approach to gather and reflect the participants insights.

² BAME: Black, Asian Minority Ethnicities

3. Findings

3.1 Participant Profile

Figure 1 identifies the profile of the participants participating in the evaluation.



3.2 Themes

From the insights provided the following themes offer an appreciation of the participants experience.

3.2.1 Applying for a Place

Information and the application process about the Future Zoo programme were shared by Future U programme coordinator with relevant contacts within the target schools and colleges, with the intention that the school/college would use its normal communication mechanisms to ensure that their relevant students were aware of the opportunity and encouraged applications as might then be appropriate.

The three participants identified that applying for a place on the programme was straightforward, with the information provided to explain the purpose and the focus of the programme being clear and understandable. Participants indicated they were either sent the application information directly by email or accessed details from a defined shared electronic school team. The information was sufficient for participants to determine that they were keen and would be really interested in gaining a place.

One participant recounted

'...it certainly engaged me because it listed everything that we're gonna do on each of the days and it was very interesting that even from reading it, I was like, '...this is perfect. I like, I need to do it because it's so it's my kind of thing' (Participant 2).

Another noted

'.. I thought. I'd just take the opportunity and see if I actually got through with my application (Participant 1).

The three participants completed their applications and following completion shared details of their interest with either college friends and/or family. In sharing the details with family members this was with an indication that the family might be able to provide some logistical support with travel arrangements should they be successful in gaining a place.

One participant noted that her family were very enthusiastic about the potential of the opportunity, while another participant noted how she checked out with her college friends whether they were intending to submit an application and remarked

'...I told him my colleague friends, because I was wondering whether they wanted to join it as well. They didn't seem as interested, so I didn't really bring it up again.... I just took it as their missing out on it. And I'm not, so it's fine' (Participant 1).

3.22 Aspirations

This theme reflected the participants aspirations as they considered their future education and career intentions, with these intentions being motivated and influenced by long standing personal interest in animal care and related aspects.

The three participants all identified a commitment in animal care from a young childhood age and how this motivated their future aspirations, with one participant having a clear intention of becoming a Vet, as noted in this comment,

'Well, ever since, I mean being a vet is kind of since I was about five... it has always been what I've wanted to concentrate on and I've just always gravitated towards animals' (Participant 2)

while another commented that they had

When I was growing up (I) have always wanted to work in a zoo with elephants. (Participant 3)

The first participant reflected how her aspirations and interests have changed over time where her interests are now more orientated on conservation concerns and how these might be reflected with a more creative based focus.

Each of the participants had direct experience of animal care through either pet ownership or work experience.

3.23 Insight and Expectations

When exploring with the participants what they were hoping to gain from undertaking the programme, what they had found most effective and beneficial they provided feedback which reflected a theme of Insights and Expectations. This is where the participants were able to indicate that they had some clear expectations about what the programme might offer but also because of completing the programme gaining valuable insights into key issues which they could then draw and reflect upon and apply in terms of their future intentions.

The three participants all expected that they would gain a close and real-world insight in working in a Zoo setting, gaining further realistic understanding clarity on roles within that type of setting and gaining new knowledge and skills into aspects of animal care. The three participants noted that their expectations were exceeded by inclusion of the other programme elements such as the laboratory session and the opportunity to think differently in how they might pursue their interest. Participant 2 commented

'Yeah, I got new insight (the science element of the programme). I'd never really considered it as a career because I never really thought, I never knew, really knew how I could take it as a career. ...actually, it was like it was more than what it said, which made it kind of even better than what I (thought)... I really enjoyed every part of it' (Participant 2).

Participant 1 observed

'And I think I was just hoping to gain an experience from a Zoo Keepers view. To see how they do things on an everyday basis. And whether that's something that I could possibly do' (Participant 1).

This same participant continued further

'The project task that we got given because I was allowed to think of doing it creatively because I did a poem and a piece of art' (Participant 1).

3.24 Influencing my Future

It was clear that participating in the programme triggered reflections and new insights about the participants potential future education and career intentions. The participants noted how they could draw upon their involvement as part of their future.

One participant noted how her involvement in the programme could have benefits such as it

'... would help with work experience wise to do with university and it's something extra that other people may not have'.

And that

'...could help me in the future if I do decide to work in a Zoo and or a vet or even just a worker, I kinda can take that with me because then I'll know the insights of it' (Participant 2).

This same participant noted how the programme had widened potential pathways which

'Well, actually I do obviously still want to be a vet, but then we did that part of the programme (I) think it was the first day at the zoo, where they showed us about conservation and all of that. And I've now looked further that if I decide I don't want to be a vet, I would not be interested in going into the conservation aspect of AC. think it can is, but it's also that in my like server future I want to actually go into like some type of volunteering of conservation' (Participant 2) .

Participant 1 noted how following involvement in one of the academic elements of the programme helped crystallise her perception that she did not want to pursue her future by progressing to higher education but rather seeking opportunities to gain employment and finding creative ways to now progress her interest in animals and conservation.

'So in my future I want to actually go into like some type of volunteering for conservation' (Participant 1).

She indicated that going to higher education was not something that she currently wished to do. She remarked that she believed a university programme on conservation

'... would be too hard to study. I was thinking it would be too time consuming and I wouldn't really get the full benefits of doing that course' (Participant 1).

Yet although this participant indicated that she did not have any current intentions to progress to HE, she did not rule out the potential of doing so at a future point. She recounted how as part of the activity which involved a tour of one of the university partners supporting the programme and meeting with a mature student ambassador that she could consider going to university at a later stage in her life.

For the third participant, she noted how

'Yes this programme has influenced my thoughts and ambitions for the future. I have contemplated going to look after animals in their natural habitat' (Participant 3).

3.35 Recommending Others

When asked what the participants would inform other potential applicants, they all agreed that they would recommend application, particularly for those with a strong desire in animal care. One participant succinctly indicated,

'Take it. You will not regret it.' (Participant 3)

While the participants were strong in their recommendation for the programme two of the participants were also clear about future participants being aware that it was more than 'a fun day out' as captured in the following,

'I'll tell them to definitely go for it if that's if they wanted to go into animals and they wanted to better into insight into the science part and the more up-close part with the animals. I say that if not, don't just do it if you think 'oh it's just sounds like a fun day at the zoo' because I mean you will have to do hard work like mucking out the animals like enclosures and stuff and all the stuff like that. But I definitely told them to go for it if that's what they wanted to do' (Participant 2).

'It's for somebody who's definitely shows enthusiasm with, say, animal care and isn't too, and isn't just into it for the animal experiencing would also really enjoy the science part or vice versa, as (if they) were too into science part wouldn't really be bothered about the zoo part, and they're just feeling like they're dragging themselves along doing it. They have to enjoy both parts and they're enthusiastic about science and being with the animals. (Participant 1).

4. Implications

The insights and experiences of the participants shared here confirm the value and impact of the Future Zoo programme. The multi-activity element of the programme has, as demonstrated by the feedback gained from the experience of the three participants captured here, been successful in generating real world insights into a particular skills sector, provided enhanced wraparound activities that showed both depth and breadth of potential careers, demonstrated new learning and applications which stretched the participants perceptions of working in the field of animal care.

The experience shared by the participants indicates that the programme was crafted and delivered in a way that it impacted upon the motivations of the participants, either by knowing how they could use the value of their participation in progressing future, clarifying thoughts about whether to progress in a particular way and/or to be open to new horizons.

This case study has indicated that the application process used to attract and engage potential participants was effective. The information shared was pitched at a level that it gave an understanding of the potential of the activity, was such that the participants were keen to gain a place and the application process was not too onerous to complete which may have been off putting to some students. The one area of potential development here though was perhaps including some further detail about the breadth and depth of activities that will be covered so that the participants had no doubt about the potential value and impact of the programme. Some further information about any additional support that applicants might need such as potential support with travelling costs might be helpful to ensure that students from some backgrounds are not certain that they can attend. Given the current cost of living crisis being experienced this might be a particular feature for

any programme supported in 2022-23.

It needs to be clear that the organisation and delivery of Future is resource intensive. It was not in the scope of this case study to consider the value for investment element. In addition, given that future funding criteria, priorities, and the funding resource available can frequently change it might require adjustment of some elements of the programme to enable delivery of the programme at a time of funding constraint. However, it needs to be indicated that on the basis of the available best evidence of what constitutes an impactful outreach intervention, and the experiences shared here, that the Future Zoo programme represents a high value activity and characterises elements which should be integrated in other supported activities wherever possible to help ensure impact.

Acknowledgements: Sincere thanks and appreciation to the three participants who took the time and commitment to share their experience.

Appendix 1

Future Zoo 2022

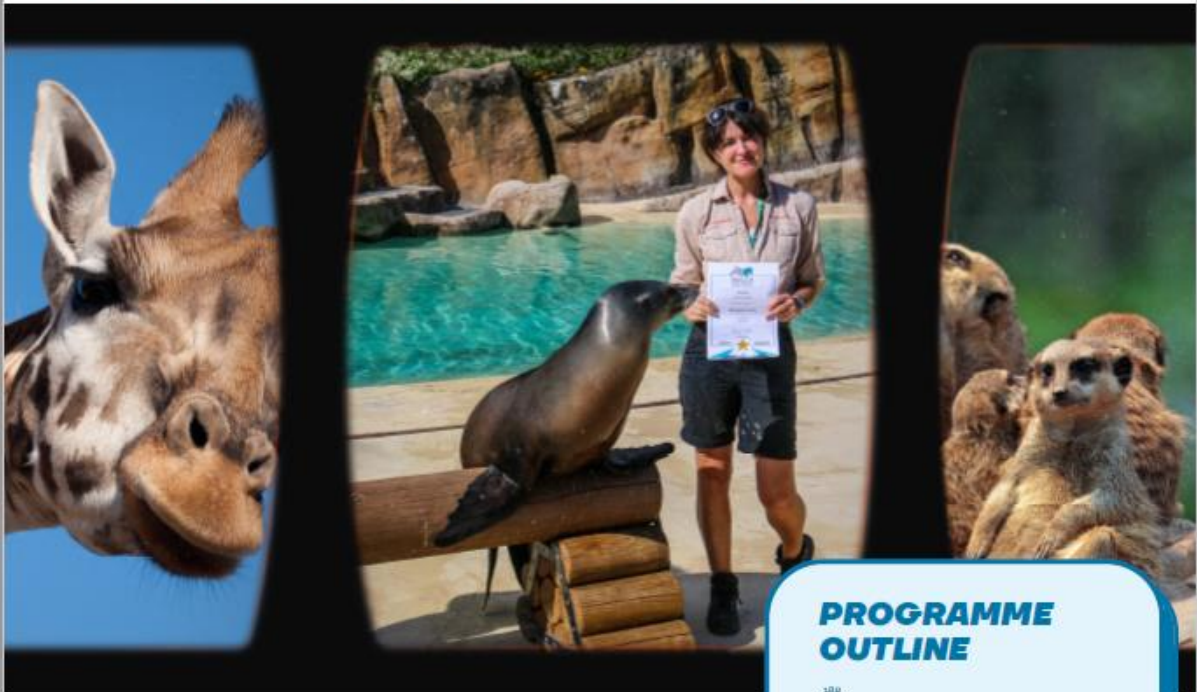
Scan to apply



Are you interested in a career in animal care or veterinary science?

Are you passionate about conservation?

Then the Future Zoo programme could be for you!



ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Studying a level 3 course and returning to school/college in September.
- Studying at a school/college in Lancashire
- Aged 16-19

Meet **ONE** of the below:

- Live in a Future U target postcode area. (Email futureuadmin@uclan.ac.uk to check if your postcode is eligible)
- Young Carer
- Gypsy, Roma, Traveller
- BAME
- Care Experienced
- SEND
- From a Military Family (Service Child)

Apply by Friday 20th May 2022

Click the link or scan the QR code to apply
<https://forms.office.com/r/rdKDwEoJEK>

PROGRAMME OUTLINE



Blackpool Zoo Course

A 2-day course offering behind-the-scenes access to life at the zoo.



Myerscough College Visit



Ecology and Conservation Webinar

Delivered by Lancaster University.



UCLan Visit & Graduation

Take part in an interactive lab session and learn about UCLan's veterinary school. Finally, your parents/carers, will be invited to the prize giving graduation ceremony.



FUTURE

