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Effective Teaching in a Humanities and Languages Foundation Year: Lessons Learned from Teaching During a Pandemic

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Abstract

This paper will explore key research around Foundation year entry at a large Northwest university in England, UK and explore what makes effective provision. It will share lessons learned during Covid-19 from student feedback from a Humanities, and Languages foundation year. There is some research around what makes for a successful foundation year. This has not had the attention it deserves, and there are still only a few papers based in the UK context. The paper explores and discusses key aspects that make a foundation entry programme successful. Furthermore, the paper explores the experiences of students from non-traditional backgrounds, (or with non-standard qualifications), and how they can underperform in comparison to students with more traditional academic backgrounds, i.e., those that have successfully passed standard Advanced Levels. In relation to non-traditional students, a good Foundation Year can help improve the outcomes for these students, and offer them opportunities to be as successful – or indeed more successful – than traditional entry students.

Keywords: Foundation Year; non-traditional students; pandemic teaching; linguistic capital; student feedback

Introduction & Literature

A foundation year (or year '0') in the UK, is a course dedicated to developing academic skills with non-traditional HE-student entrants; the premise is that as an introductory course it will enable students to progress and proceed onto a university-based degree programme. Foundation years are delivered at universities, and are classified as a UK level 3 qualification, which means that they are equivalent to A-levels or other HE Access Courses, (many of which tend to be delivered at further education (FE) colleges). In the university context, a foundation year is usually part of a degree-transition pathway; for students who pass the foundation year, they have the option of automatically progressing onto the first year of a 3-year degree programme. For students who do not meet the standard university entry criteria, this means that they can access a university degree, via this bridging or transitional programme (Black, 2021). A foundation/Year '0' programme is distinct from and very different to a foundation degree, which is a programme that can be completed in 2 years at an FE college; 2-year foundation degrees have a further option whereby completing students can register for a final top up year, (based at a university), in order to

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obtain a full honours degree (UCAS 2023). There tends to be more flexible requirements for foundation degrees, as such, they can be more accessible than traditional university degrees. Furthermore, foundation degrees tend to be more common in vocational subjects; currently (for the 2023/24 academic year), they are not available in Humanities and Languages subjects through UCAS. The most common subject areas for foundation degrees are early years and childhood education, along with computing related subjects.

There are also funding implications for the different types of courses, depending on whether it is delivered in an FE college or at a university. FE-based courses are generally cheaper to run in comparison to university based programmes, and so attract slightly lower fees. There are various reasons for this, such as the fact that FE staff are not paid as highly as university staff; in conjunction with this, FE colleges generally have smaller facilities and fewer resources. There has also been a government announcement that by the 2025/26 academic year, the funding available for some foundation year courses delivered at universities in England is being reduced. Based on the suggestions from the 2019 Augar report (Lewis et al., 2023), this will be reduced to £5,760, down from the maximum of £9,250 (a reduction of £3,490 per student), in order to bring costs more in line with FE based Access courses. However, this move will only target classroom based subjects in the Humanities, Business and Social Sciences. The cost of delivering a foundation year at a university will of course remain the same, with the same staff teaching on the degree programme, and students accessing and using the full facilities of the university. The result will inevitably inflict a significant funding cut for these courses (Hale, 2022); and this will make it difficult for some universities to maintain a foundation year. Against this backdrop of changes, this paper will elaborate on the purpose of a university based Foundation year, along with exploring key research on what makes an effective Foundation year; all of this is further supported with perspectives from students who have studied a Humanities and Languages foundation year.

The foundation year is essentially the start of a 4-year degree, and is geared towards enabling students to develop a familiarity with the university and its procedures, as well as accessing university resources and getting to know teachers who will likely teach them in subsequent years. The foundation programme contains modules specifically developed to enable students to understand the expectations, teaching, and assessment methods of university-level study. Most foundation years include an academic literacy development module as well as other tailored modules for their programme (Chivers, 2019; Goodchild, 2019; Black, 2021).

Most foundation year students in the UK come from widening participation groups, which are often from more deprived areas, 56% are from POLAR4 quintiles 1, 2 and 3 (compared to 48% of 1st year entrants).[1] They include higher proportion of minority ethnic students, and often are the first in their family to go to university (Office for Students, 2019). Students can be of any age from the typical 18 year old up to the more mature adult learner. There is no upper age limit, but maintenance loan funding is reduced if students are over 60 (GOV.UK, 2021). On the whole there tends to be a higher proportion of mature students (aged over 21 at time of study), than standard first year university entry students who still tend to be mostly under 21, white and middle class (Hale, 2020). The number of mature students accessing university-level study is growing again after a sharp decline over the last few years (HESA, 2020). This makes foundation year a very diverse cohort of students with many widening participation characteristics. Widening participation was a government strategy introduced by the New Labour government in 1999, and was informed by the Kennedy report on Widening Participation (published in 1997), to explore widening access for students from various disadvantaged and non-traditional backgrounds. The purpose of this initiative was to enable students from non-traditional backgrounds to access university education. Within this, the Foundation year is a key aspect of widening participation (Fowle, 2018; Office for Students 2019). There are of course other ways of accessing university

[1] For more information on POLAR4, see https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/about-polar-and-adult-he/

degree courses for widening participation students such as Access to HE courses. Access courses differ from the Foundation Year (FY) in that they are usually delivered by Further Education (FE) providers. However, numbers on Access courses have been shrinking whilst FY courses have seen a huge rise of 718% since 2011 (DFE 2023). Access courses can be more geographically accessible for students as not everyone is close to a university, whereas most people tend to live much closer to an FE college. In the main, Access courses have more mature students than a typical FY and have less students of colour. FY students also tend to study different subjects in comparison to Access students, with higher numbers of FY students studying STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects. Health related subjects however, tend to have higher numbers on Access courses (Office for Students, 2019). Even though the purpose of FY and Access courses are broadly the same, FY programmes tend to prepare Widening Participation students for university more effectively and seamlessly. Students on a FY tend to have better progression and completion rates as part of a 4-year degree (Office for Students, 2019), as they readily acclimatise to the university and its learning environment. In England, FY Humanities & Languages, Medicine, and Dentistry courses have the highest degree completion rates of over 60%; Business and Computing have the lowest rates of around 40%. The average Access to HE course sees around 55% of students starting the course successfully secure acceptance at a university; of that quota, 75% go on to complete their degree (QAA 2023), producing an overall Access course completion rate of around 41%. Statistics for FY students are comparable with 1st year traditional university entry students, with a minimum of 85% in employment or further study 15 months after their degree course completion (DFE 2023). Students undertaking an Access course have a 70% rate of employment after degree course completion (QAA 2023). The Access to HE data does not seem to break down results by subjects studied, location or other characteristics with regards to degree outcomes, so it is difficult to pin down more information on completion rates, and the employment rate and if some subjects or types of student fare worse than others.

Since FY students come from a more diverse demographic and educational background than traditional entry students, there are additional considerations that need to be addressed. FY students often do not have the academic capital that traditional entry students typically have (Bourdieu, 1986). They are usually unaware of the nature of the university environment and the expectations they will need to fulfil. Students from Widening Participation backgrounds tend not to be as successful at university as traditional middle-class students, who are already familiar with the learning practices and habitus of the university (Reay, 2016). Because of the socio-economically diverse nature of FY students, there is a need to introduce them to the nature of university study and its expectations, and to start to develop the linguistic capital they will need to succeed at university. As FY courses have a higher proportion of mature students, they have been out of education for a significant period, and need additional support to help them become familiar with successful study skills at this level. In this sense, one of the main purposes of the FY is to develop student confidence.

Theorising Capital

There are key theoretical concepts around academic writing that are important to understand when it comes to non-traditional FY students. French, talks about academic writing as being a 'privileged and exclusive linguistic form' (2019:1609). One of the main forms of capital that FY students develop is linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Sullivan, (2001: 893) explains that linguistic capital is a specific form of cultural capital, and refers to the "ability to understand and use educated language". Research by Lea & Street (1998), moves away from a skills-based deficit model of academic writing, which previously just looked at superficial errors in student work, viewing academic writing as a technical skill. They prefer to see academic writing as a collection of literacy abilities (Lea and Street, 1998).

Learning to learn in higher education is a challenging and complex process, and cannot be approached as a bolt-on approach to fixing academic writing (Dampier et al., 2019). An *academic literacies* approach understands the nature of student writing within institutional and disciplinary power relations

and structures, and views 'literacies as social practices' (Lea and Street, 1998:159). This approach develops a student's academic identity and awareness of subject epistemologies. An academic literacies approach is more concerned with meaning making and identity shift and conflicts, than correcting grammar. This is not to say that grammar is not important, but for a student to feel that they belong within a specific discipline, much more complex issues also need to be addressed. This is vitally important for FY students who already lack this sense of academic confidence and belonging.

Imposter syndrome is one of the factors that can exacerbate issues with a student's confidence and sense of belonging:

> 'Imposterism, at its root, is about an inability to accurately self-assess performance. In addition, diminished self-confidence and self-efficacy is known to accompany imposter tendencies' (Parkman, 2016:52).

It is a well-researched area in education, affecting students at every level, as well as academic staff (Chapman 2015). Much research on impostor syndrome focuses on the perspective of an internal feeling that needs to be fixed within the individual. But there are structural and institutional forces at play which can lead marginalised students to feel more like an impostor than the traditional white, middle-class student (Breeze, 2018; Hewertson and Tissa, 2022). It has been shown to be tied to student identity and belonging in 1st year students (Scanlon et 2007). So impostor beliefs can be influenced by feeling out of place in an unfamiliar environment, which clash with perceived privileges associated with other social, academic and cultural capitals, usually associated with white, middle class students from highly educated families (Reay 2016). Students undertaking Foundation Degrees (where they start in an FE college and then complete their final year at university), are more likely to feel out of place, and not feel good enough (Morgan 2015). This is also generally the case with students who take a FY before they start their target degree. Most students coming to university through non-traditional routes, have either had prior educational struggles or come from marginalised backgrounds, and lack the social capital of traditional students (Brandle 2017).

In this context, the FY aims to address and start to resolve lack of self-confidence, and to empower students to access and navigate the culture of exclusivity associated with the controlled space of the university. The culture of power has been discussed by Delpit (1988), who addresses the dominant discourses and practices enacted in classrooms which privilege the knowledge and experiences of dominant groups. Educators need to be aware of the power relationships which manifest in classrooms and support students who may not have the experience, insight, or confidence where dominant cultures are concerned.

These principles and concepts above further link with issues associated with the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum refers to that which is implicit and expected, but not clearly explained in either the classroom environment or documentation (Orón Semper and Blasco, 2018). The curriculum itself might not be purposefully hidden but constructed by educators who have underlying assumptions about what students know or are able to do. Mass schooling has played a role in reinforcing social norms and the dominant status quo, which informed the hidden curriculum concept by Jackson (1970). This also led into research by critical scholars on why inequalities persisted, and led to further understanding of the non-academic functions and effects of schooling (Vallance 2014), as well as the ideologies embedded in the curriculum and other interactions within the educational environment (Giroux 2019). Research into the hidden curriculum is informed by critical pedagogy, which sees education as much more complex and socially constructed than the banking or skills model (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2019). Education is much more than the technical transfer of skills. Critical pedagogy is also focused on social justice and democracy, which are important parts of supporting marginalised students and widening participation. We use this pedagogy to support personal growth as a key part of education that is often omitted from the training or skills model. But is vitally important in education, especially in FY as it intersects with many other aspects like confidence and academic identity (hooks, 2010; Giroux, 2019). There can be

assumptions about what the students understand from learning outcomes and assessment. This can lead to a focus on technical skills and passing assessments rather than addressing epistemological issues, such as understanding knowledge construction within a particular discipline. Making expectations at university explicit is especially important for students coming from marginalised backgrounds, without the social, cultural and academic capital of their middle class white peers.

What makes a successful Foundation Year?

There is limited research on specific FY provision that answers the question 'what makes a good foundation year?' Much of the research around FY is either disciplinary specific or focuses on aspects within FY like using MS Teams or tackling admissions policies. However, there is some research that can be applied to multidisciplinary contexts. The importance of student centred, constructivist and transformative critical pedagogies is mentioned by some research, and that they can enable a sense of belonging, instil confidence and challenge deficit approaches to knowledge or ability (see Mcdowell, 1995; Aburizaizah, 2013; Dampier et al., 2019; Syme et al., 2020). Such open and critical approaches can be used to develop appropriate academic and linguistic skills and capital, and enable students to progress and help address the structural and cultural classroom barriers (Delpit 1988). As we have seen above FY students have a greater need for emotional safety and support due to suffering impostor syndrome or lack of confidence (Parkes et al., 2018a; Saunders, 2020; Hewertson and Tissa, 2022). Supportive pedagogical approaches and the strategies mentioned above can help students to develop confidence and alleviate some imposter syndrome feelings. In order to find out what works for Humanities & Languages students, the paper will now move on to look specifically at an integrated Humanities and Languages Foundation year in the UK, an area that is underrepresented in the current research landscape.

Structure of FY at a post-92 northern university

In the multidisciplinary Humanities & Languages foundation year, students take a study skills module and modules focusing on critical thinking skills, introduction to research, digital skills for research, as well as modules covering more disciplinary specific content. The modules are interlinked to ensure that opportunities emerge to apply the knowledge and skills from each area, across the programme; this enables students to develop their own insights and connections with the discipline and subject specific knowledge. All modules provide students with a choice of assessment topic and cover real world issues relevant to the subject. There is a variety of assessments, ranging from essays, presentations, and multiple-choice exams in semester one, to group research posters, reflective diaries, and digital projects in semester two. The first year that this was taught – in 2015 – it was assumed that the study skills module would be applicable to any subject, so it was also incorporated by computing and forensics. However, this did not work well. There were disciplinary differences between the humanities and the sciences and significant variances in the kind of assessments taken. This is supported by research (Lea and Street, 1998; Wingate and Tribble, 2012; Dampier et al., 2019) that states that students need to be able to understand their own discipline's conventions of constructing knowledge and how to become independent learners. One size does not fit all when it comes to developing academic literacies. We now have modules entitled Skills for Education, Skills for English Studies and Skills for the Humanities. The titles of the modules may indicate a focus on skills rather than literacies, but they are very much focused on developing the relevant subject specific literacy practices that the students will need when going into the 1st year of their degree. Students are also encouraged to develop empathy, emotional intelligence, teamwork, and related social skills.

The FY is based around a student centred, critical pedagogy (hooks, 1994; Giroux, 2019; Saunders, 2020). This inclusive approach values student's experiences and backgrounds and is compassionate and flexible, with a social justice lens. FY aims to empower students to develop across multiple areas through interlinked content, avoids deficit approaches and tries to only have tutors who share the same ideals. It is best to avoid 'reluctant lecturers' as explained by Dampier et al., (2019) where staff are filled in from elsewhere just to meet

teaching quotas without a consideration of the fit with the FY pedagogies. This can make a significant difference in engendering a sense of belonging and confidence. It is also important to acknowledge the assets students bring with them to university, as well as furthering their knowledge and access to the culture of power (Delpit, 1988). The strategies mentioned above are used to make the hidden curriculum and university expectations explicit, (Orón Semper and Blasco, 2018) and to allow practices to focus on demythologise university level work, as part of a scaffolded and supportive environment. Progression and attainment rates on this particular programme are higher than the national average for students taking an FY. Students who go through our FY are more likely to graduate especially if they are a mature student, than students entering at 1st year. We have 84% of students entering through foundation year, graduate with a degree compared to a sector average of 73% for foundation entry degree programmes (OFS 2022). Good degree outcomes for the FY are rising year on year, from 60% for those who started in 2016/17 to 71% in 2018/19 with students under 25 outperforming direct entry students who started in 2018/19 with 92% getting a first or upper second class degree, compared to direct entry student's sector average of 76%. (OFS 2022). As we develop and improve the course, the students are achieving better degree outcomes. This is particularly impressive as OFS (Office for Students) data shows that students with low or non-standard entry qualifications like BTEC's (which make up the bulk of Foundation students) tend to do worse on continuation measures with 21% not progressing to year 2 of the degree and only 71% getting a first or upper second class award.

Methodology

The conceptual framework for this study was informed by a social constructionist approach linked to critical pedagogy and feminist methodologies (Gergen 1999; Wigginton and Lafrance 2019). This acknowledges the way that students co-construct knowledge through the social environment of the course; along with the subsequent power dynamics, influenced by capitals and the prior experiences of the learners. The study sample is from an FY at a large Post-92 university, with students on various humanities, social science and languages degree pathways. The class sizes for most multidisciplinary lectures are between 80-100 students, with an good attendance rates. Based on university-specific demographic data the average student cohort in the FY is around 56% female, 25% students of colour, and about 55% over 21 years of age; 54% of cohorts are the first in family to go to university.

All Humanities & Languages FY students were asked to fill out a student feedback form as part of the normal course evaluation process, and asked if they gave their permission for the anonymous data to be used to inform teaching and research. Out of the students asked, 23 filled in the form and gave permission for their data to be used. The forms were anonymous, so it is not possible to report on the demographics of those who participated. There was a free text box for them to give more information, 14 students provided comments here. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2020) was the best fit with the feminist and constructionist framing using the free text comments provided by the students. The recurring themes were developed through the coding process and data was interpreted deductively with the prior theoretical ideas informing the analysis.

FY Student feedback from a post-92 Northwest UK university

Students are asked to give feedback on every module in the foundation year programme as part of the normal mid and end of course evaluation. The students are given an anonymous Microsoft forms link for their feedback. This form has a consent request at the bottom of the form to say, are you happy for the anonymous data you have submitted to be used for teaching or research purposes. Only the students who consented had their data used as part of this study. As part of this course evaluation, they are asked what worked well, what could be improved and if they had any further comments. The last two years of data have been thematically analysed to pull out the key themes around what worked or needed to be improved (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This includes the emergency remote teaching year 2020/21 due to the Covid 19 pandemic and the blended learning year 2021/22, which consisted of

one-hour online lectures and two-hour campus-based seminars or workshops. This is different to how we would traditionally teach the foundation year which would be predominantly campus based. Since the whole group lectures can be up to 100 students, it was not considered to be a good experience for staff or students during a pandemic to have a large group of students mixing in a lecture theatre with limited ventilation.

The online lectures had a much higher student engagement with over three quarters of the class participating at least once per session in the lectures (contributing to 2616 chat messages through the chat function in Microsoft Teams) than the traditional large lecture theatre which can be quite intimidating and tends to lend itself to a more teacher dominated discourse. Research by Mulryan-Kyne (2010) shows that this behaviour in lecture theatres is due to students feeling anonymous, being uncomfortable and confused in large classes, which leads to more passive behaviour in class, and they are less likely to make contributions. Online, students seem less aware of the number of other students in the class and are often in more control of their physical space. This can be beneficial for students with anxiety and some specific learning differences. Shaw, Hennessy and Anderson, (2021) found that the online environment with easily accessible supportive technologies levelled the playing field more for dyslexic students. The students in their study commented that the ability to rewatch lectures and slow videos down was valuable. There was not as much pressure to perform in class and students could take their time and work at their own pace outside of class. Students commented that they felt more in control of their own learning compared to previous educational experiences. This is supported by feedback from FY students at my university who report similar experiences. This comment from Student 1 explains the usefulness of online and recorded classes. "*The online classes were really useful as I could go a look back and look at them especially when I later can't make sense of my notes*." This indicates that some students don't just attend class at a specific time but revisit the lesson in order to further develop their understanding.

Online learning comes with its challenges but also benefits some students. In 2020/21 teaching was all online. The lectures were live and recorded in Teams. The seminar groups each had a private Teams channel with about 20 students in each and were also held live. The instructions for the sessions were recorded but since the sessions themselves were activity or discussion based, these were not recorded. Breakout rooms were a useful feature in Teams when doing group work, but since most students did not want to put their camera on, or share their screen, it made it difficult to see if they were struggling. The students tended to engage more in the Teams chat box. The campus seminars for 2021/22 FY had class sizes of 25-30 students. Being on campus in the same room made it easier to set up discussion groups and activities than 2020/21 when it was predominantly online. It also made it easier for the tutor to wander around the room, check on students' progress, and help any student they could see was struggling. One module on study skills in 2021/22 also had a drop-in online tutorial once a week in the late afternoon, which by student request turned into an online seminar group. This started with 17 students who regularly attended for several reasons. This group included neurodivergent students, students with childcare responsibilities, and students with anxiety. By the end of the 1st semester this was the only seminar group to have high numbers of students still consistently attending and engaging. This online class had no less than 12 students during the semester, had an average attendance of around 18, and recorded up to 33 students attending just before the winter break. This number saw students from other seminar groups on campus attending the online class. On campus during the first few weeks of term there were 15-25 students in a seminar group, which dropped to under 50% attendance after half term, with numbers as low as 2 students before the winter break. It is interesting to note that although students do mention that they want campus teaching, by the end of the semester they are more likely to attend an online class. This attendance level reflects pre-pandemic years where there were no online sessions, but also saw low campus attendance towards the end of the semester.

Students reported in their feedback a higher preference for campus teaching in 2020/21, when

they had emergency remote teaching due to the pandemic. In 2021/22 there was strong support for live online and recorded teaching sessions and a smaller number of students preferring campus provision. The mode of delivery utilising online lectures with campus seminars seems to be popular with students in 2021/22. This next section reports on a thematic analysis of student course related feedback from FY since the start of the pandemic. Two major themes came out of the student feedback alongside several minor themes. This paper focuses on the 2 major themes of support and mode of delivery.

Support

The No.1 thing that students appreciated and needed in foundation year was support and helpful staff. This is not surprising and is reinforced by the research mentioned previously (Mcdowell, 1995; Sanders and Daly, 2013; Garnham and Betts, 2018; Jones *et al.*, 2018; Parkes *et al.*, 2018b; Dampier *et al.*, 2019). What is not obvious however, is what makes good support from staff. This includes teaching staff, student coaches and support departments like the library, Wiser (in house academic support and learning development centre), the technology support team, inclusive (disability) support, mental health and wellbeing, and admin office support. There are many ways to support students and they do not all rely on the classroom.

Student coaches (academic coaches) have only been in place since 2020 and have made a valuable contribution to student support. They are staff who deliver personalised support for learners through coaching. The main aim is to help learners to develop skills which they can use independently in future. Student coaches may support learners who have fallen behind with work to plan their workload and manage their time effectively, as well as developing stronger time management and organisation skills for the future. Coaches can support learners who are low in confidence, are struggling to adapt to student life or an academic routine, as well as helping them to re-engage with their studies if they have lost focus or motivation. Coaches may also identify other areas of concern and refer to services such as Wellbeing or Student Services as well as support the students to speak to their academic team about course concerns. This is especially important for FY students who are unfamiliar with the university environment and expectations. The success of coaching as an approach to support students with progression has been demonstrated by Mogashana and Basitere (2021), this approach is particularly beneficial for students who are new to the university environment. Another useful element of support is Wiser which is a long running in-house learning development service, who specialise in supporting academic writing through workshops and one to one appointments. They work on developing students linguistic capital alongside the teaching staff. Wiser provides needed support as students in large classes and with small teaching teams, are not always able to get enough attention from the tutors. The Wiser specialists help the students access any additional support needed to develop their academic literacies and capitals.

Many comments from students around support and helpful staff are linked to critical pedagogy and student-centred work. These critical approaches are where teachers or support staff do not hold a deficit view, but value students for who they are and what they bring and demonstrate radical openness and a caring environment with cultural inclusion and respect (hooks, 1994). Several of the student comments say similar things, for example, Student 2 comments, "*The tutors made you feel very relaxed and put your mind at ease while also prompting you to do the best you can*." Ten students specially mention staff being helpful. Student 5 comments that they like how staff are "*helpful and non-judgemental*". These pedagogies are informed and reinforced by research which talks about the importance of support and the need to avoid a deficit view which can marginalise students. This deficit view can influence how teachers view students, seeing them as challenging or lacking ability (Dampier *et al.*, 2019; Dunn, 2019). This is supported by student 6 who states their tutor is "*a positive individual and has a brilliant outlook on learning and motivates me to continue studying*". Student 7 comments that they like how staff "*answer questions without making us feel daft, explaining it fully but not overcomplicating things*." Some students can find it difficult or daunting to ask for help when they need it (Baker and Spencely,

2020), so, the approachability and caring nature of staff is important to develop this learning community. This links back to the principles of social justice and inclusion in how we perceive and treat our students. Giving students from marginalised backgrounds the respect and support needed to succeed.

Mode of Delivery

Online lectures are scheduled through Microsoft Teams and delivered live. Students just click on the link in Teams or their email as it automatically adds the lecture meeting to the Outlook calendar. Live online classes which are recorded are another popular element of student feedback. Students like the engagement in the live online classes as Student 9 mentions *" online lessons as they are interactive* and *fun*" and stated how helpful it is to be able to access lecture recordings to review their knowledge or catch up on a missed class. Student 8 states "*recorded lectures/seminars are great for backing up study. Particularly if you have missed some because you have had external pressures*". This is corroborated by student 10, who attends the online classes live but appreciates that they are also recorded, "*online lecture recordings makes it a lot easier to go back and look over something you can't remember or understand.*" About half the students who responded to the feedback evaluation reported that they watched the recordings, most of these also attended live, with only 2 reporting that they watched the recordings instead of going to the live lecture. In research by Adedoyin and Soykan, (2020) and Shaw, Hennessy and Anderson, (2021) they extol the benefits of the flexibility and interactivity of online provision. Students still have reasonable attendance, even when they know it is being recorded. This flexibility is important for students who have work and caring responsibilities. Student 11 states "*The online sessions were essential to me as it cut the time down that I would need to travel, saving money and being able to be at home with my children if needed. Also, being a student parent, it has been handy to have online classes as it relives stress from getting to and from dropping and picking up the children*." Students are more likely to miss the on campus classes if they have work or caring responsibilities. This is supported by attendance levels on campus being lower for on campus classes where 30-50 % of the class generally attend, than online lessons, where 80-90 % of the class attend. This is also reported by the students who filled in the feedback form.

The live online lectures seem to work well for most students with 40% preferring online over campus based sessions, and 50% stating they prefer the hybrid learning environment of a mix of online and campus based sessions. As student 14 mentions " *Hybrid was more enjoyable than just strictly one method - I preferred early morning classes being online and later classes being in person*." Only 10% of students in this group stated they prefer campus only classes. Online lectures also have a much higher engagement than in a lecture theatre. Few students are confident enough to come on microphone/camera, but this is common for university students who have moved to emergency remote teaching, due to concerns about internet connection, appearance, and judgements on living arrangements (Castelli and Sarvary, 2021). In FY some students share living spaces or have children who they do not want shown on camera. It can even be more beneficial for students to use the chat box alongside the lecture presentation. Not only is it easier for the students to contribute via the Teams chat function than to speak up in a large lecture hall, but this mode of communication allows relevant discussion to happen alongside the lecture without interrupting the flow of the presentation. This has been demonstrated by Galloway et al., (2022) who analysed Teams chats alongside lecture presentations. They found that since teachers also keep an eye on the Teams chat, they can answer questions that come up or clarify areas of confusion.

Students think the online sessions are engaging and interesting, as Student 3 comments "*I really liked your approach to teaching online and I personally thought it was really engaging.*" Student 4 mentions that, *"I really like the online learning with the foundation year, it feels like a nice way of easing back into education.*" Only three students mentioned they would prefer teaching only in person in 2021/22 when lectures were online, but seminars were predominantly on campus, as they found it hard to concentrate online, or preferred the interactivity of the physical classroom. Student 1 states, "*I enjoy learning in person as I am able to focus easily,*

however, online I often have internet connection issues or am unable to concentrate due to other distractions." This student makes an important point, that not every student will have a stable internet connection or a quiet home environment to study. One solution to this problem could be using a library study room which has a good internet connection and is quiet, although this may not work for everyone. Student 11 raises an interesting point about the familiarity of a classroom environment being preferred even if it makes little difference to how they learn, "*being physically in class doesn't help me much more but it's something that I'm used to when learning and sometimes makes things a little easier to process*".

More students were feeding back that they wanted more campus teaching in 2020/21 when it was all online. But this could be in part due to missing the familiarity of the classroom. As mentioned earlier, attendance and engagement with online groups before the winter break was much higher than on campus. So, striking a balance between flexible online provision and campus teaching is preferred by most students. This is especially important in FY as many students have either family or work responsibilities on top of university, and still must deal with the pandemic. Online learning courses are seeing increasing numbers of mature, first in family students enrol, due to the flexibility and ease of access (Stone et al., 2016). This is supported by student 8's comment, where they talk not only about the ease of access but their level of confidence in engaging with the session. "*The online sessions, they were much easier to attend and I feel more confident participating*." Opportunities to access university through different modes of study is part of inclusive learning and teaching practices. 'Inclusive learning and teaching in higher education refers to the ways in which pedagogy, curricula and assessment are designed and delivered to engage students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all' (Hockings, 2010:1). McDuff et al., (2020) talk about an inclusive curriculum framework where accessibility and mode of delivery are key concerns, as well as enabling students to see themselves in the curriculum and equipping them with skills for the modern workplace. Flexible teaching delivery makes it much easier for them to access the material and lectures. Working online also improves their digital competencies, which are increasingly sought after in the workplace. Online lectures and recordings support the flexible teaching and assessment recommendations which are also present in some of the academic paper themes. But only a few specifically talk about online provision or recordings (Jones et al., 2018; Saunders, 2020).

Hybrid learning environments allow students both online and on campus access to university and is more flexible to students needs (Meydanlioglu, & Arikan, 2014). This learning environment can relieve some of the pressure students face from being on campus constantly, as student 13 mentions, "*They worked well for me especially on days I had a lot of classes. Having at least 1 out of 3 classes online in one day meant it was slightly less stressful.*" On campus students get to share a classroom and work directly with each other and the teacher. It makes sense to spend campus classroom time undertaking seminar group activities and discussions as it is easier to facilitate this in a physical classroom. When necessary students can also interact with the seminar via Teams linking them up with students in the physical classroom. This works for students who are ill or have childcare responsibilities but don't want to miss sessions. This hyflex session is not the same as being in the campus classroom as it does have its challenges. This mirrors research by Kohnke, and Moorhouse, (2021) who found difficulties with communication and group work in hyflex sessions, but students who opt for this mode do like the flexibility it offers. With regards to online provision, we need to be careful that we acknowledge digital poverty and that not everyone can access all online resources. During lockdown 2020/21 we sent out digital devices and internet dongles to hundreds of students. In 2021/22 we booked computer labs for students who needed to take part in online classes but did not have the required tools or a quiet space. These measures seem to help in creating equitable access to university classes. Since these measures have only been implemented over the last 2 years, we still need to see how this impacts degree outcomes. But it is predicted that increased accessibility and support will help narrow the gap for mature students

who are not getting the same level of good degree outcomes as the students under 25. This prediction is based on research including the NUS and Million+ report, Never too Late to Learn, which states that mature students cite lack of support and accessibility among the issues they face when they are considering dropping out (McVitty and Morris, 2012). They also found that the biggest challenge faced by mature students was balancing study with other commitments. As mentioned earlier students with working or caring responsibilities found having some sessions online really helped them attend and engage. The added flexibility and support we have implemented through the hybrid learning environment should help reduce these burdens. Having both the flexibility and accessibility of the online large group lectures, whilst providing a smaller campus based classroom to consolidate learning and provide more opportunity for discussion.

Discussion & Conclusion

Since the OFS (2022) data shows the lower progression and attainment rates of students entering university via non direct entry to 1st year. It is significant that FY has a higher than average success rate in both these areas. Especially with over half the students having no experience of the university environment, being 1st in family to attend, and many being from non-traditional backgrounds. FY addresses and resolves some of the challenges that students face, like imposter phenomenon by building their confidence and providing the appropriate support. There is no deficit approach to fixing their lack of skills. But there is an awareness of the power dynamics and habitus of university that privileges certain capitals. The expectations are made clear and the culture of power revealed so there is no hidden curriculum (Delpit 1998; Orón Semper and Blasco, 2018). A critical pedagogy approach values students for the knowledge and ability they already have, and builds upon that using a scaffolding approach. There is a dialogue between educator and learner, each having something valuable to bring to the shared learning environment (hooks 1994). It is also important that educators are flexible in our provision to enable students who work and have caring responsibilities, the ability to access the course outside the traditional classroom structure. This is where hybrid learning environments are a useful tool for equity and accessibility.

Equitable support and access to university are issues of social justice. Widening participation is a great ideal, but we also need to make sure we address how effective we are at helping these students succeed. There are similarities but also differences in priorities in the recommendations from the research previously mentioned, from mostly STEM subjects, and from students' feedback from Humanities and Languages. In every situation support is important, FY students will need support to understand the university environment which is likely to be vastly different to anything they have done before. This then leads onto developing students' confidence, which can be done in diverse ways depending on the type of student and the subject studied. But if they have support from across the university most students will be able to tackle their challenges head on, providing there is open communication and feedback with students and staff (Meer and Chapman, 2014; Francis, Millington and Cederlöf, 2019; Carless and Winstone, 2020). It also helps if the academic and support staff have mutual respect and avoid thinking of students within a deficit model.

The main differences in approaches for the Humanities & Languages students compared to STEM students, are around academic writing practice. This is why a combined FY of STEM and Humanities does not work. There is a stronger focus on essay writing in Humanities and Languages, and a lack of discipline specific writing practice which is not addressed as much as it should be in the FY research landscape. However, learning to learn and developing their academic literacies is a key part of any foundation year, and how this is enacted through transformative critical pedagogies again links back to the avoidance of a deficit model and respect for students' diverse backgrounds. This clear development of disciplinary specific academic literacies can also help to address some structural and cultural barriers and inequalities, as educators will not assume prior knowledge but meet students where they are at and help them to develop through clear, practical approaches.

A well-structured FY provides well defined goals and structure, which has clear, detailed teaching

which is easy to follow at the right pace but is flexible to student needs. Providing flexible teaching and assessment opportunities can mean a variety of things, but the one the students commented on the most during the pandemic was the mode of delivery. This is less well mentioned in the research, much of which was pre-pandemic. This will hopefully gain more attention since we are now seeing the benefits of flexible online provision as well as campus-based teaching. It may be beneficial to have the option for online delivery when you know campus attendance will be low. These key recommendations should hopefully help any FY programme, or indeed any inexperienced student cohort. Much of what works for foundation students would also benefit direct entry students from diverse backgrounds, addressing the culture of power Delpit (1988) mentions, but we also need to be mindful of disciplinary specific academic literacies (North, 2005; Wingate and Tribble, 2012). Tailoring our teaching to the students we have, not the students we expect, and effective coordination with relevant support services will help us to tailor our provision to support all our students.

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Open Access Policy

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