

317 'I would probably still be sort of floundering a little bit now if I didn't have the Foundation year and the skills that it afforded us.'

Louise Webber

University of Plymouth, Plymouth, United Kingdom

Research Domains

Student Access and Experience (SAE)

Abstract

Foundation Year programmes enable students, who had not considered university level study, to embark on a four-year degree programme (Webber, 2023,a,b). This conference paper and presentation will share initial findings from a small-scale longitudinal research study in the UK, focusing on the lived experience of five students during their degree with Foundation Year programme (Webber, 2020, 2023a, 2023b). Initial findings reveal how well the Foundation Year prepared students for university level study including the development of study skills, self-belief and academic confidence (Webber, 2023a, 2023b) . Factors that have led to these findings will be explored during the presentation.

Full paper

Introduction

In the UK, Foundation year programmes provide a stepping-stone into Higher Education for those believing it is not accessible to them (Prospects, 2023). They promote widening participation by accepting students with low UCAS tariffs, students with non-traditional qualifications, mature students and those who have been out of education for a long time. Foundation year programmes are viewed as a pathway to promote equal opportunities for disadvantaged and mature students (Nathwani, 2019). A Foundation Year programme enables students to become accustomed to the field of study and develop study skills needed for university level study (Prospects, 2023).

Research aims and methods

We introduced the BA Hons Early Childhood Studies or Education with Foundation year programme at the University of Plymouth in 2019 . We were curious about whether this course prepared students for university level study, and how successful these students would be during the duration of their four-year degree (Webber, 2023a, 2023b). We felt the best way to measure this was through a longitudinal project to track the experiences of the new students on our Foundation year programme, from their first year to the end of their degree studies.

Research into the extent to which Foundation year programmes successfully prepare students for degree level study is limited (Curtis et al., 2017; Nathwani, 2019). Therefore, this longitudinal project offered an opportunity to collate narrative data to develop the body of knowledge from a student perspective.

Ethical approval was granted through the University Ethical Committee. Five mature students volunteered to be part of the longitudinal research study, names have been changed to preserve anonymity. Interviews took place twice a year, during their four year degree programme, to capture their changing experiences and perceptions of their university journey.

Findings

For the purpose of this paper, I am going to focus specifically on how well the Foundation Year prepared students for university level study.

The students were glad that they had the opportunity to complete the Foundation year and felt it gave them the necessary skills to embark on year one of university with confidence:

'I think the Foundation year massively prepared me for it [Year 1]. I think if I had gone straight into this, I think I would not be okay.' Flo

'...so pleased that I'd done that year [Foundation Year], and I would suggest anybody, who, you know they might have been out of education for a while, raised a family, gone to work, maybe they've left school but are not quite sure that they've got the skills to jump straight into a first year, I would recommend it.' Diana

'I'm really glad that I did it. I think maybe that year allowed me to sort of park my old career and get a bit of confidence that I could do something different... it was just a comfortable experience and I think...I might not have made it through this year if I didn't do that.' Kate

Many students, initially lacked confidence in their ability to study and felt they needed to prove themselves, they also struggled with imposter syndrome (Chapman, 2015).

'I've got impostor syndrome enough as it is. To know whether or not that was the right step to take at the time [starting the Foundation Year], I was a bit confused, but now I'm sort of like loud and proud I did it and I'm pleased I did.' Diana.

'Foundation for me has been great and it's shown me that I am capable of certain things that I would have said, no, no, she can't do that. Because I've been told my whole life you can't do that.' Stephanie

Being able to develop their study skills enabled their academic confidence to develop:

'I think Foundation ... sets you up as a student more than anything.' Flo

'I feel like all of the work done in Foundation year is a huge help for the first year because you get that head start ... whereas I am more confident in my coursework than a lot of my colleagues are.' Tony

Conclusion

Initial findings from this small-scale study suggest the value of Foundation year programmes in developing the confidence and academic skills of students who may not have considered university level study before. Foundation year programmes have the potential to transform student self-belief and open up opportunities that they had not thought possible. These themes will be explored in more detail in future papers and at the SRHE conference to analyse good practice and factors that may have led to these findings.

References

Chapman, A. (2015) 'Using the assessment process to overcome Imposter Syndrome in mature students', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 41, 2: 112-119.

Curtis, E., Wikaire, E., Jiang, Y., McMillan, L., Loto, R., Fonua, S., Herbert, R., Hori, M., Ko, T., Newport, R., Salter, D., Wiles, J., Reid, A. and P. (2017) 'Open to critique: predictive effects of academic outcomes from a bridging/foundation programme on first-year degree-level study', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 42, 1: 151-167.

Fern, J. (2021) 'Why you should consider a foundation year' [Online]. Available at <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/applying-for-university/choosing-a-course/why-you-should-consider-a-foundation-year> (accessed: 15th June 2023).

Nathwani, T. (2019) 'Year 0: A foundation for widening participation?' Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/blog/16-05-2019/foundation-year-research> (accessed: 15th June 2023).

Prospects (2023) 'Why you should consider a foundation year'. Available at: <https://www.prospects.ac.uk/applying-for-university/choosing-a-course/why-you-should-consider-a-foundation-year> (accessed: 15th June 2023).

Webber, L. (July, 2020) 'Can everybody hear me?': Foundation year students' experiences of studying during lockdown'. BERA Blog. Available at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/can-everybody-hear-me-foundation-year-students-experiences-of-studying-during-lockdown> (accessed: 15th June 2023).

Webber, L. (2023a) 'Evaluating the Foundation Year – 'Foundation sets you up as a student more than anything!' Submitted to publication with the *Journal of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning* (under review).

Webber, L. (2023b) 'Using capital, habitus and field to explore Foundation Year students' Higher Education experiences during COVID-19', Submitted to publication with *Journal of Further and Higher Education* (under review).