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Perceptions of 'Value' in Foundation Year Programmes

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This dissertation is submitted to the Department of Education
for the degree of Masters of Science
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Abstract

Universities have developed Foundation Year programmes to widen participation and provide an alternative access route into higher education. Foundation Year programmes are designed to target students who have not met the A-level conditions needed to gain university admission and qualification. The provision of Foundation Year programmes has, however, been criticized by policy makers who argue that they are cash-cows for universities and exploitative of students. Drawing on data from Foundation Year programmes students and practitioners in England, this study aims to do two things: first, to investigate and assess the value of Foundation Year programmes from the perspective of students and of practitioners who teach on them; and second, to assess the role of Foundation Year provision and its place in higher education. I use the Capability Approach to evaluate Foundation Years, in particular how the programmes impact students' ability to take advantage of opportunities. The findings reveal that students have a wide-ranging understanding of the value of Foundation Year programmes. Students express strong support for the continuation of Foundation Year programmes and reject the suggestion that they are exploitative and a poor investment. The data show that Foundation Year teaching methodology is suited to students' individual circumstances and life contexts: the education is pluralistic and the programmes encourage students to think critically about their subject matter in relation to the wider world. The capabilitarian evaluation also reveals that the provision is highly valued by students and universities alike and serves as a valuable tool for Widening Participation.

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Dedication

I dedicate this project to five women who made me who I am today:

Zubeida, Amina, Farina, Ivonne, and Parvine.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

We must therefore construct a liberal education that is not only Socratic, emphasizing critical thought and respectful argument, but also pluralistic, imparting an understanding of the histories and contributions of groups with whom we interact, both within our nation and in the increasingly international sphere of business and politics (Nussbaum 1997, p. 295).

Higher education in England is under scrutiny. Policy makers argue that some degrees have limited value for students and represent a poor investment for government funding (OfS, 2020b). That argument relies on neoliberal, instrumentalist approaches that focus exclusively on labour market outcomes and future wages. This instrumentalist model ignores the needs of certain students who require non-traditional support in order to flourish at university and beyond. Students who take advantage of Widening Participation opportunities and those who have struggled historically in school are being ignored in the relentless push for efficiency and skills development. Yet, there are pathways in British higher education that do place value the importance of meaningful participation and enhanced student support. This study explores one such pathway in detail: the Foundation Year.

I first became interested in Foundation Year programmes during my time as a project officer at SOAS University of London in 2018 and 2019. I had the opportunity to work with faculty and staff who were directly involved in the process of developing a Foundation Year programme. That in turn prompted my interest in Widening Participation, in particular how universities seek to improve access and participation across all underrepresented groups. In 2019, the 'Post-18 Review of Education and Funding: Independent Panel Report' (henceforth Augar Report) appeared, querying the value of Foundation Year programmes. Despite the misgivings expressed in the report, the SOAS Foundation Year went ahead largely due to overwhelming student demand. For me, questions remained. Why were Foundation Year programmes being discussed mainly in such economic terms, without reference to their wider value to Widening Participation and to improving equity? Did students themselves think that an additional year of student loans was a poor investment in their academic preparation? How did students react to the 'value-for-money' discourse and 'low value' degrees discourse around Foundation Year provision? What did Foundation Year practitioners think of the Augar Report's findings?

These questions, notably how students and practitioners perceive the value of Foundation Year programmes, were not addressed in the Augar Report. There is also a gap in the literature, which fails to take into account the perspective of academic staff and students who see the value of Foundation Year programmes “on the ground”, so to speak. This study seeks to address this gap and thereby contribute to the research on Foundation Year and Widening Participation.

In her book *Cultivating Humanity*, in which she defends the value of liberal arts education in the United States, Martha C. Nussbaum argues that education should emphasise values that were once espoused by Western Liberal thinkers such as Socrates and Seneca. For her, the value of education lies in its ability to help young citizens become critical thinkers and active members of democratic society. She argues that higher education, notably liberal arts colleges in the United States, are attempting to “confront the passivity of the pupil” (1997, p. 28) and encourages them to take control of their learning and the formation of their opinions through rigorous academic study.

Socrates believed that education should be for everyone and that the teaching model should reflect the student’s circumstances and context (Nussbaum, 1997). Socrates’ suggested model of contextualised learning is becoming more widely adopted in British higher education (see Carnell, 2007 and Harris & Dargusch, 2020) as part of a larger shift to more inclusive teaching practices and widening participation. The goal of Widening Participation is to enable greater equality of opportunity and to reduce social and economic inequality (Archer, 2003). Admitting more students from diverse backgrounds to university is only a first step. Universities are also going to have to adapt to students who come from backgrounds characterised as “other”. Some students may be mature; some students may have alternative qualifications; some may be the first in their families to go to university; some may be care leavers or young parents. Current teaching and learning models may not cater to these students, and indeed, may even diminish the value of higher education for them.

In order to provide a suitable teaching model, there has to be an understanding of the “transformational relationship to knowledge that changes the sense of who [students] are and what they can do in the world” (Ashwin, 2020, p. 3). This necessitates asking students about their perceptions of value and asking practitioners how they can maximise that value in their teaching and student support.

1.1 Foundation Year: An Overview

The Foundation Year, also called the integrated foundation year, is a programme offered by universities as part of the undergraduate degree. Courses that include the Foundation Year are normally four years long and have a fee structure identical to direct-entry undergraduate programmes. Direct-entry undergraduate degree programmes are normally 3 years long, with students beginning their first year at qualification Level 4 and graduating after completing Level 6. Foundation Year programmes, in contrast, begin at qualification Level 3. The expectation is that students will continue onto Levels 4, 5, and 6 after successful completion of the first year (OfS, 2019).

A Foundation Year programme is designed to target students who have not met A-level conditions by providing an alternative pathway that leads to a university qualification. True to its name, it provides students with a *foundation* of academic skills to progress onto Level 4, the first year of undergraduate study. No two Foundation Year programmes are alike, though most include a guaranteed progression route to Level 4 upon successful completion of the first year. Some universities, such as Nottingham, guarantee progression with a particular mark (normally 60) while also having a lower pass mark (normally 40). If students pass but do not progress, they are qualified to apply to other universities for entry at Level 4. Figure 1 below shows the progression of a student through the levels, from Foundation Year to graduation.



Fig 1: Progression of first-degree programmes in England, including Foundation Year

In 2017-18, the number of students on Foundation Year programmes numbered at 30,030 (OfS, 2019). That figure has risen to an estimated 55,000. Many universities maintain that Foundation Year programmes offer students, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, the opportunity to go to university; their rising popularity appears reflective of a student population eager for routes into higher education. The independent regulator, the Office for Students, however, questions whether Foundation Year programmes are sufficiently different from the Access to Higher Education Diplomas offered at a fraction the cost by Further Education Colleges. The Augar Report too calls into question the financial value of Foundation Year programmes for students and queries their impact and value.

Whatever the view, one thing is clear: policy makers do not fully understand what Foundation Year programmes offer and how they differ from other Widening Participation pathways available in higher education.

1.2 Aims of this Study

This study has two principal aims: first, to investigate and assess the value of Foundation Year programmes from the students' perspective and from the perspective of practitioners who teach on them. The second aim is to clarify the role of Foundation year provision and its place in higher education in England. This research is situated at a cross-section section between government and social policy regarding the value of higher education provision. I survey students and I interview practitioners to determine what they perceive is valuable about Foundation Year programmes and then use Sen's Capability Approach to holistically evaluate

the provision. I pay particular attention to how the programmes impact the ability of students to take advantage of opportunities (Robeyns, 2017).

Regarding terminology, it is important to note that Foundation Year programmes are not Foundation degrees. Foundation degrees are two-year academic and vocational degree programmes (UCAS, 2018) that end at Level 5, while bachelor's degree programmes must continue till at least Level 6. Students on Foundation Year programmes, the subject of this study, complete Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 and graduate with a bachelor's degree.

1.3 Outline

In Chapter 2, "Literature Review", I situate Foundation Year programmes in the wider policy context of higher education and Widening Participation in England. In addition, I discuss the concept of value in educational research and explore different theoretical approaches to value formation, in particular the Capability Approach. The chapter concludes with my research questions. The research questions ask how current and former Foundation Year students perceive value and how practitioners perceive and impart value-based strategies to students.

In Chapter 3, "Methodology", I describe how I gather data to answer the research questions. I use of a mixed methods approach comprising of a quantitative survey with student participants and of interviews with practitioners. I also discuss the ethical practices that underpin the research and briefly discuss the limitations of the study.

In Chapter 4, "Findings", I present the findings. I combine both the qualitative and quantitative strands of data in this chapter to mutually reinforce the validity of the findings and highlight areas where there may be discrepancies.

In Chapter 5, "Discussion", I evaluate the data against seven criteria from the Capability Approach framework. The data reveal that Foundation Year provision is distinctive from other

undergraduate pathways available to students and serve an important function as a Widening Participation initiative. The data show that Foundation Year programmes are perceived of as highly valuable by students and practitioners alike and illustrate that financial value is not the most important consideration for students and that other “softer” skills and experiences are of greater value. I critique the Augar Report’s findings about Foundation Year provision that rely on neoliberal theory and human capital theory and instead suggest that a holistic framework like the Capability Approach is a more sophisticated tool for assessing value.

In Chapter 6, “Conclusion”, I propose areas for further research. I also answer the research questions and describe how this study contributes to the research on Foundation Year provision.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Review Approach

This literature review focuses on empirical and theoretical research about Foundation Year programmes and value-based theories in higher education, notably the Capability Approach. As far as I am aware, there are no empirical studies on Foundation Year programmes that use the Capability Approach. I draw on foundational works, granular studies, government reports and opinion pieces. A visual representation of the literature review is included below in Figure 2.

I used key search terms such as ‘foundation’, ‘widening participation’, ‘higher education’, and ‘student choice’ in my initial search for empirical scholarship on Foundation Year programmes. The search term ‘foundation’ also yielded scholarship on UK Foundation Degree programmes; the latter are not relevant to this study. The scholarship on Foundation Year programmes is not substantial: this meant I could read most journal articles that made substantive reference to the subject. By utilising forward snowballing (Punch and Oancea, 2014) with citations in these initial articles, I was able to expand greatly my access to related scholarship. I was also able to access grey literature on the topic of Foundation Year programmes and related policy documents.

Capability research is well-established in the field of educational research and made the literature simple enough to find using search terms such as ‘capability’, ‘education’ and ‘capability approach higher education’. Since the scholarship on the Capability Approach in education is vast, I have limited this review to scholarship that thematically blends the framework with ideas of equity in education and widening participation.

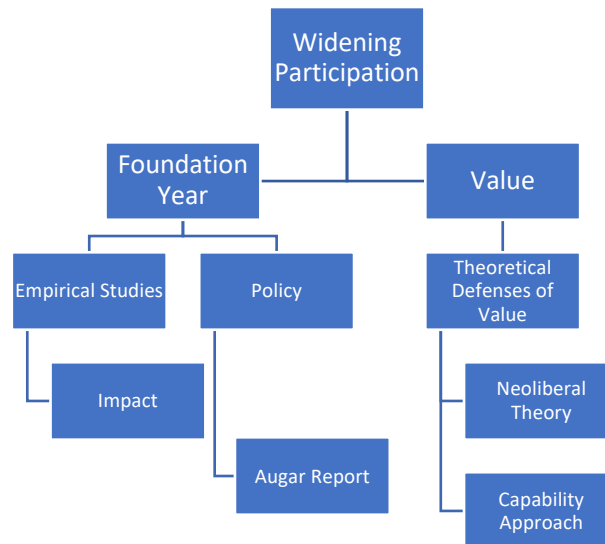


Fig. 2: Major themes in Literature Review

2.2 Widening Participation in England

Widening Participation policy in the United Kingdom was effectively launched with the release of the Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997), which laid the groundwork for a concerted policy effort to expand access to higher education for underrepresented groups. This has since evolved to include an audit function of universities' Widening Participation activities. This is accomplished by having universities submit annual Access and Participation plans to the Office for Students (OfS, 2020a). These plans, through which universities clearly define and operationalise proposals to expand university access to students from underrepresented groups, are required by law. Foundation Years feature prominently in Access and Participation plans and are often referred to as leading Widening Participation schemes.

In the 24 years since the Dearing Report, there has been significant activity trying to improve student access to higher education. Nevertheless, according to the Department for Education, in 2018-19 Black students were least likely to progress to *high tariff* higher education at 9.8% while white working-class pupils were the least likely group to progress to *any* higher education at 38.3% (DfE, 2020). Universities have expanded their contextual admissions processes (Boliver

et al, 2015), expanded their role in outreach in school districts in underrepresented areas, and developed programmes for mature students to retrain or to pursue lifelong learning. Universities throughout England developed Foundation Year programmes. Student numbers in alternative access routes such as Access to Higher Education courses in Further Education Colleges have been declining while student numbers in Foundation Year programmes are rising year on year (OfS, 2019).

The Dearing Report noted that Widening Participation objectives should demonstrate a “good investment for individuals as well as society” (Archer, 2003). The financial investment of Foundation Year provision is an important area for government evaluation, in particular the cost to government to fund student loans. Such considerations recur in both scholarly and grey literature about Foundation Year provision and are discussed in more detail below.

2.2.1 Foundation Year Programmes and Widening Participation Policy

Universities have recognised that Foundation Year programmes offer students, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, additional options to go to university. But the ways in which universities develop Foundation Year programmes as a Widening Participation initiative differ from one university to another. This makes the provision difficult to understand from an outside perspective and even more difficult for the Department for Education or the Office for Students to regulate. With no single model for Foundation Year provision, terminology can also differ. Some universities use “Foundation Year programme” while others use “integrated foundation year” or “[Subject] with a foundation year”.

There is little empirical research evaluating Foundation Year programmes as a Widening Participation strategy or as one that provides students with a foundation to pursue further higher education. Much of the existing Foundation Year research is on elite institutions (Trow, 1973) such as Russell Group universities, Oxford (Hall et al, 2019; Sullivan et al, 2019b) and Trinity College, Dublin (Sullivan et al, 2019a). There is little attention paid to mass higher

education institutions. In this study, I try to address this gap by focussing on mass higher education institutions in England. Trow characterises mass higher education institutions as the larger and more inclusive universities, with more permeable boundaries for social mobility and a stronger commitment to equality of opportunity than elite institutions. Trow also points out that mass higher education institutions offer “compensatory programs” that may help reduce inequities for “deprived social groups” (1973, p. 14). A Foundation Year would, for Trow, be such a “compensatory program”; it is worth noting that they do exist in some elite institutions as well. Research is needed to properly assess the impact and value of “compensatory programmes” in mass higher education institutions, not just in the elite institutions, and from the students’ perspective in particular.

Policy recommendations about Foundation Year provision were published in the ‘Post-18 Review of Education and Funding: Independent Panel Report’, better known as the Augar Report (DfE, 2019). This wide-ranging report was released in May 2019 and addressed higher education at Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6 as well as skills shortages, student loan funding, and tuition costs (McVitty, 2019). The report concluded the following about Foundation Years:

It is our view that the inequity in funding and support available for Access Diplomas compared to the package available for foundation years is resulting in poor value for money for both government and some students. We recommend that student finance is no longer offered for foundation years, unless agreed with the OfS in exceptional cases (DfE, 2019, p. 107).

The authors of the report argue that Foundation Year programmes are designed by universities to “entice students who do not otherwise meet their standard entry criteria” and to oblige them to take on a fourth year of loans (DfE, 2019, p. 107). They query why students would choose a Foundation Year course when Further Education Colleges provide alternative and more cost-effective routes into higher education. They qualify their recommendation by noting

that changes “should not be implemented without notice of at least two academic years” due to the potential impact on Widening Participation (DfE, 2019, p. 107).

The Augar Report’s recommendations are complicated by the fact that they assume that all Foundation Year programmes are the same, which is not the case. This fact is not addressed in the report, nor is there any discussion of the differences between Access to Higher Education diplomas in Further Education Colleges versus Foundation Year courses in universities. The Augar Report’s findings are therefore reductive and do not take note of the differences between university provision and Further Education College provision. The recommendations are heavy-handed because they generalise about a provision that is itself not standardised and because they suggest that financial value is the most important factor for students when selecting higher education programmes. Perhaps most problematic of all, the report’s recommendations have put Foundation Year provision on unstable ground for both students and practitioners without clearly understanding what Foundation Year programmes do for students, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds.

The difference between Further Education College provision and Foundation Year programmes was partly reviewed in a report also released in May 2019 by the Office for Students titled “Preparing for degree study: Analysis of Access to Higher Education Diplomas and integrated foundation year courses” (OfS, 2019). The report compared students on Foundation Year courses and Access to Higher Education courses in the UK and found, unsurprisingly, that “while there are similarities between Access to Higher Education Diplomas and integrated foundation year courses, there are also important differences” (OfS, 2019, p. 3). They found that students on Foundation Years were more likely to have a higher commitment to taking degree-level study at a specific university than students on Access to Higher Education courses. Students on Foundation year courses also showed a consistently higher rate of progression to degree level study within 2 years than students on Access to Higher Education courses, 79% compared to 62%, (see Figure 3 below).

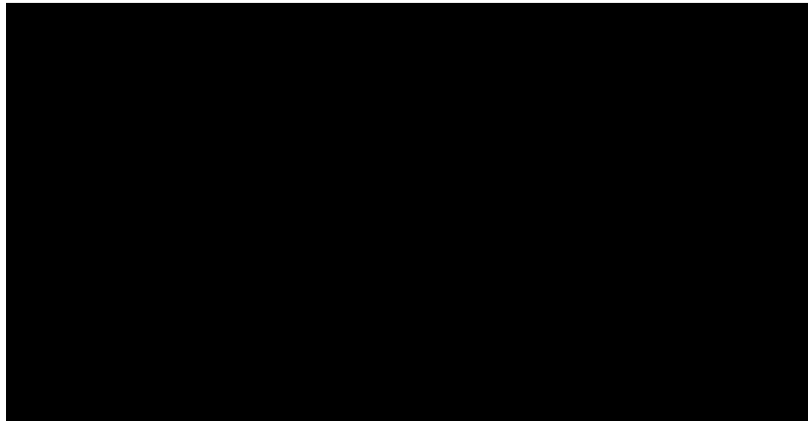


Fig. 3: From “Preparing for degree study Analysis of Access to Higher Education Diplomas and integrated foundation year courses” (OfS, 2019, p. 17)

The recommendations in the Augar Report that over-emphasise financial value have not been well received by higher education think tanks and administrators in the sector. In his contribution to a blog titled “The Value of Foundation Years in Higher Education” published on the HEPI website in 2019, Professor Nick Braisby, the Vice Chancellor of Buckinghamshire New University, directly addressed policy makers in government as follows:

So, should anyone in government feel that funding for foundation year sought to be reviewed, I would ask three things: a) understand why these are meeting a market need; b) listen to the students; c) understand the value of foundation years in widening participation” (Braisby, 2019).

This study directly addresses Braisby’s points (b) and (c).

At the time of writing the government has yet to release a comprehensive response to the Augar Report’s recommendations. For the moment, universities in England continue to develop Foundation Year programmes and recruit students.

2.2.2 Empirical Studies on Foundation Year Programmes

Research on Foundation Year programmes has addressed a range of issues at the forefront of UK higher education discourse and policy. These include research on contextualized admissions processes in Foundation Year programmes (O’Sullivan et al, 2019a; 2019b) and scholarship reflecting the struggles associated with the transition into higher education, especially among those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (Bartels-Hardege, 2018; Chivers, 2019; Treffert-Thomas & Trott, 2019; Jonas et al, 2020). Indeed, Foundation Year programmes provide a backdrop for various very relevant policy discussions in higher education, including the effects of conditional admissions, the impact of aspirations discourse (Hart, 2016; Harrison & Waller, 2018) and the positionality of working-class students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds within universities (Reay et al, 2010; Ferguson, 2019; Hale, 2020). These all pertain to the present research. Areas of particular interest relate to confidence and belonging, both of which come up repeatedly in research about Foundation Year students.

There is no one model for Foundation Year programme design or for student fee structure. The Foundation year programme at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford and the newly formed programme at Cambridge (BBC News, 2021), for instance, are restricted to “disadvantaged students” and are free. In both, students can study social science and humanities and progress onto full programmes without needing to reapply. The Foundation Year programme at the University of Bristol, by contrast, is for anyone over the age of 17 from any social background and costs £5,150 in 2020-21 (University of Bristol, 2021). The programme covers Arts and Sciences only and guarantees progression if students show ‘satisfactory completion’. At the University of Hull, both domestic and international students can apply for the Foundation Year which includes pathways for Arts, Social Sciences, and STEM subjects. The cost per year is the highest rate for undergraduate study, £9,250 for domestic students and £14,000-£16,000 for international students (University of Hull, 2021). Student loan funding is available and student progression is guaranteed after ‘satisfactory completion’ of the course.

Although universities in England have each developed their own structure for their Foundation Year programmes, all share the underlying principle of providing a pathway for students to progress onto degree programmes. The distinctions are in the financial considerations, the subject areas, the admissions criteria, the pedagogical model, and the curricula.

Students on Foundation Year courses are often ones who have had unfavourable previous educational experiences. There is also a substantial group of students who struggle with learning disabilities, mental health issues and poor health (Hale, 2018). In addition, there is a contingent of mature students who choose Foundation Year programmes to ease themselves into university life after a long break from education. As a result, many students have low confidence and struggle with imposter syndrome and with developing a sense of belonging. Research on Foundation Year students has revealed these struggles and academics have consequently tried to address these issues in their teaching. Seal and Parkes (2019) at Newman University suggest that including students' previous experiences in one's pedagogy is necessary in order to build student confidence. In the context of the Arts, Wagstaffe (2020) suggests that a key element of Foundation Year provision is developing safe spaces to enable students to increase individual confidence.

2.3 Value in Higher Education

Value literature involves different theoretical calculations which result in conclusions to determine if something is valuable or not. Skeggs and Loveday (2012) define value as a measurement that derives meaning from economics or moral philosophy. I build on a definition of value put forth by Tomlinson, who argues that "value is one which permeates many discussions on the purpose of higher education and the perceived benefits it confers on individuals and society as a whole" (2018). My research questions address the value of Foundation Year programmes, which necessitated an exploration of value-based literature in higher education.

2.3.1 Neoliberal Theory

Much of the literature about value in higher education emphasises the economic value of degrees over other kinds of value that may also be important to students and their families. Ministers in the Department for Education have suggested that some degrees are of “high value” and others of “low value” (Higgins, 2020). Low value degrees, they argue, are not in the students’ best interest to pursue nor in government’s interest to fund. Paul Ashwin argues that such “economic considerations of the value of higher education have overreached themselves and have begun to distort debates about the educational value of university education” (2020, p. 1). In the 2016 White Paper, for example, value is equated to future wages, inextricably linking students’ employability outcomes to the value of degrees (DBIS, 2016). Tomlinson (2018) has argued that this framing has succeeded in foregrounded value for money at the expense of other values.

The foregrounding of financial value is widely considered the neoliberal approach (see David, 2009 and Marginson, 2014) and linked closely to human capital theory (Becker, 1962). Human capital theory is tied to ideas of productivity and employability. It is not surprising, therefore, that productivity, efficiency, employability, and value for money feature prominently in discussions of the value of higher education. Human capital theory has been roundly discredited by social scientists as a useful theoretical model to reflect the complexity of student decision-making (see Brown et al., 2003; Livingstone & Pankhurst, 2009; Brynin, 2012; Williams et al., 2015). These researchers and others argue that neoliberal approaches do not take into consideration the wide array of competing priorities in students’ lives that affect their choices or their conceptions of value. Tomlinson argues that “human capital, currently the dominant value marker, is only one component of higher education’s personal value alongside its potential for enhancing students’ self-knowledge and relationship to self and others” (2018). Ashwin (2020) is right that such economic and human capital-based values are important, but they are not necessarily very useful when evaluating higher education provision from the

perspective of students who assess value on a spectrum that includes financial and non-financial choices.

There are other, albeit less influential, approaches to understanding value in higher educational research. Harvey and Knight (1996) offer an argument for the “value for transformation” that higher education can offer students. Novakovic (2019) suggests that “experiential knowledges” are important measures of value and argues for including students’ life experiences in teaching methodologies. In an empirical study linking value to class, Archer (2003) found that working class men were more likely to cite economic motivations of value when evaluating their higher education experiences whereas women were more likely to cite personal, social or family motivations. Archer also noted that ethnic minorities considered the social value and gaining community respect as important motivations and reasons to value higher education. Clifford (2018) argues that few approaches, including neoliberal theory, take into account the “softer skills” that higher education can help instil in students, such as confidence. A more holistic approach to value measurement is possible in the Capability Approach.

2.3.2 The Capability Approach in Educational Research

Arguments about value that do not foreground money or labour market success struggle to compete with human capital theory; that said, the Capability Approach has gained substantial ground since Amartya Sen introduced it in his *Tanner Lectures* (1980).

There has, in fact, been an explosion of capabilitarian scholarship on the reconceptualization of problems in the social sciences, including in education. The Capability Approach is a framework concerned with defining and measuring value in human welfare, thus making it a useful normative framework for this study. It is centred on two concepts: capability and functionings. A capability is “a person’s ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being; [it] represents the alternative combinations of things a person is able to do or be” and a functioning is an achieved outcome from a particular capability (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993,

p. 30). In this framework, students are seen as individuals with capabilities that require nurturing and development to elicit the best possible outcomes in their lives (ibid.).

The question of the applicability of the Capability Approach to higher education has been explored by many researchers (see Lozano et al, 2012; Walker, 2012; Wilson-Strydom & Walker, 2015; Harrison et al, 2018). In an article in the *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Saito highlights the linkages between capability and education: “[t]here seems to be a potentially strong and mutually enhancing relationship between Sen’s capability approach and education” (2003). Indeed, in *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (2011), Nussbaum writes that education has always been at the centre of the Capability Approach.

The Capability Approach is a particularly useful tool for analysis of Widening Participation policy and its implementation as it recognises that a student is a holistic individual. It valuably introduces the concept of “social conversion factors”, the social norms, policies and structures that affect a student’s ability to take advantage of available opportunities (Robeyns, 2017). The Capability Approach advocates an evaluation of higher education in a way that is not centred on the generation of human capital and graduate premiums at the expense of other equally important human capability measurements, and a focus rather on an “equality of capabilities” (Wilson-Strydom & Walker, 2015). Wilson-Strydom define this as “meaningful participation in education that concurrently supports well-being for the student” (2016).

Walker and Unterhalter provide a rich analysis of the Capability Approach and its usefulness as a framework for education:

when we evaluate social (and educational) arrangements against a criterion of justice and considerations of equalities, it is people’s capabilities that must guide the evaluation rather than how much money, education resources, or qualifications they are able to command (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007).

Their work provides a basis for my use of the Capability Approach in the context of Foundation Year research.

Walker describes the value of the Capability Approach as an evaluative tool: “a capabilities approach shifts the axis of analysis to establishing and evaluating the conditions (social contexts) that enable diverse students (agents) to make choices about what they want to be and do” (2012). Evaluation of students’ social conditions and the diversity of their experiences feature strongly in Foundation Year provision. These factors are often overlooked in Widening Participation policy and indeed, they are overlooked in instrumentalist approaches to university evaluation that we routinely see in higher education policy documents.

Sen (2009) describes the holistic understanding of student well-being and student success by talking about the Capability Approach as a framework that seeks “to clarify how we can proceed to address questions of enhancing justice and removing injustice” (p. ix). For Alexander (2008), the Capability Approach is a way to maximize the “greatest possible condition for the realisation of basic capabilities for all” (p. 1). Nussbaum agrees and suggests that the Capability Approach is a useful way to think about students’ “lives in practice” (Wilson-Strydom, 2015).

In *Wellbeing, Freedom and Social Justice: The Capability Approach Re-Examined* (2017), Ingrid Robeyns lays the groundwork for a clearly articulated system for utilising the Capability Approach in social science research. She advocates a grounded and clear understanding of capability vocabulary and discourse that I utilise in my own research methods and analysis. Following Robeyns, I am careful also to align my empirical and theoretical research to the general framework of the Capability Approach rather than to a specific capability theory. As a result, I am able to use the framework as an evaluative tool to reflect on the ways in which students and practitioners on Foundation Year perceive value.

2.4 Conclusion of Literature Review

2.4.1 Limitations of Previous Studies

The concept of the value of Foundation Year programmes has been discussed in policy documents and in the media extensively and defined in terms of financial value or value-for-money. The Augar Report ultimately pronounced that Foundation Year programmes were of little financial value to students and were, rather, a cash cow for universities (DfE, 2019). The report failed to ask students what value they derive from Foundation Year provision or to seek to understand why students were choosing Foundation Year courses over Access to Higher Education diplomas in Further Education Colleges.

Empirical studies about Foundation Year students also skirt the issue of value and tend to assume that the audience is already convinced of the value of Foundation Year provision. While this makes sense for practitioners who already feel that way, it does little to convince sceptics or bring around those who believe Foundation Year programmes are exploitative of students and a poor investment for loan funding. Such sceptics may also be unconvinced that Foundation Year programmes really do support students from underprivileged backgrounds if those students are forced to take on expensive loans that may never be repaid.

2.4.2 Purpose of this Study

It is unclear how students define value in Foundation Year programmes or why they choose Foundation Year programmes over other undergraduate options available to them. It is also unclear if students are convinced by the financial discourse around Foundation Years which policy officials argue is of primary importance to students. Understanding what kinds of value (academic value, social value, intrinsic educational value, progression-to-degree value, financial value, and so on) motivate students on Foundation Year programmes is necessary in order to better understand what makes them unique and, ultimately, worth maintaining. Utilising the

Capability Approach as a theoretical framework to understand students' perceptions of Foundation Year programmes can help answer some questions about Foundation Year provision and their place in the higher education.

2.5 Research Questions

This study is organised around two main research questions:

1. How do current and former Foundation Year students in mass higher education institutions perceive the value of Foundation Year programmes?
2. How do Foundation Year practitioners define the value of Foundation Year programmes for students?
 - a. What strategies are used by Foundation Year practitioners to impart value?

Chapter 3: Methodology

I rely in this study on a mixed methods approach: I use a quantitative survey method to gather data about students' perception of the value of Foundation Year programmes and semi-structured interviews to elicit views from practitioners. I discuss below my rationale for a mixed methods approach, the process for gathering participants, and the relevant ethical considerations. In the data analysis section, I explain how I combine the data from student participants and the interviews to generate findings that validate and corroborate each other. Finally, I address various limitations of this study and my strategies to limit their effects.

3.1 Study Design

My research is situated in a realist ontology (Pring, 2004)—that is, it concentrates on the meaning that people bring to the work of Widening Participation; and my epistemological approach is constructivist in nature (Punch & Oancea, 2014)—that is, it recognises the importance of the socially constructed realities of myself as a researcher as well as of the participants with relation to access, participation, and equity in education.

Cognizant of Pring's (2004) assessment that creating a duality between quantitative and qualitative research is a mistake, I nevertheless recognise that a combination of approaches is necessary for me to be able to answer my research questions. I selected mixed methods research *after* I designed the research questions in order to avoid methodolatry, or what Punch and Oancea refer to as putting the "metaphorical cart before the substantive (or content) horse" (2014, p. 115). This methodology interacts with the research questions in active ways and generates findings upon which future action can be based (Lather, 1986), notably in the form of recommendations to policy makers and practitioners regarding the improvement of Widening Participation practices in higher education in England.

I use elements of grounded theory, in particular simultaneous data collection and analysis, comparisons, sampling for theory construction, and analysis based on data rather than pre-conceived hypotheses (Charmaz, 2006). Combining elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (Johnson et al, 2007) allows for the development of a more comprehensive understanding of Foundation Year provision in the wider ecology of Widening Participation provision in the British higher education landscape. The quantitative data serves to corroborate data from the qualitative strand and to validate findings and vice versa (Gomm, 2008). Teddlie and Tashakkori note that mixed methods “can simultaneously address a diverse range of confirmatory and exploratory questions, while single-approach studies often address only one or the other” (2010). This methodology effectively allows me to explore a range of questions in addition to the explicit research questions that form the basis of this study.

There is, moreover, a substantive and growing literature devoted the credibility of the mixed methods approach for educational research (see Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010; Pearce, 2015; Hasse-Biber, 2010). Mixed methods researchers do not agree on one definitive way to design mixed methods studies, but scholars do agree that the data gathering method must directly relate to answering the research question (Oancea, 2015; Gorard & Taylor, 2004). My research design is accordingly developed through a question-driven approach. Scholars such as Gorard and Taylor (2004) and Morgan (2007) also advocate for this “bottom-up” approach (Johnson et al, 2007).

3.2 Participant Selection

As my research explores value from the perspective of students and practitioners, it necessitated seeking out participants who were involved in Foundation Year programmes on a daily basis. These participants would be best placed to share their perceptions of value through interviews and questionnaires.

I first approached practitioners who had published in the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network*. The Foundation Year Network is a group of Foundation Year practitioners who hold academic and administrative positions in Foundation Year programmes. As the only national body for Foundation Year provision in the UK, the membership and the Executive Committee provide policy feedback to the Department for Education and share best practices with the wider Foundation Year community.

Since my research question focussed entirely on Foundation Year provision, it made logical sense to approach Foundation Year practitioners who had published in the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network* first. The recruitment strategy for interviews was thus a deliberate purposive sample (Miles & Huberman, 1994), whereby the participants are information-rich on the subject of Foundation Year provision. In addition to being excellent first contacts, they were able to provide advice as I developed a recruitment strategy for student participants.

From the three Foundation Year Network journals published online, I created a long list of academic staff from Red Brick, Specialist, Young Civic, Russell Group, Plate-Glass and Post-92 universities in England. From the long list, I chose universities whose Foundation Year programmes are integrated into the four-year undergraduate degree, that is, where the fee structure for the first year of the programme is the same as the subsequent three years, capped at a maximum of £9,250 per year. Students are thus eligible for student loan funding to cover the cost of all four years of the degree. The Foundation Year programmes at Oxford and Cambridge excluded from my study because they are elite institutions and because they are free for students. Ultimately, I gathered data from ten higher education institutions (Trow, 1973) in England in order to develop an understanding of the differences in how Foundation Year programmes are delivered. The classification of universities that were involved in this study are in Table 1. I have used the British university classification to underscore a wide range of institutions who deliver Foundation Year programmes.

Table 1: Classification of Universities in this Study

University Type
Red Brick University
Specialist University
Young Civic University
Russell Group University
Russell Group University
Post-92 University
Post-92 University
Post-92 University
Plate glass University
Plate glass University

I emailed sixteen academic staff members at fifteen universities to request an online interview about their views on the value of Foundation Year programmes. I used this opportunity to also ask if they thought their students would be interested in participating in the study by answering an online questionnaire. I received eleven replies. Eight academic staff agreed to an interview and to distribute the questionnaire; two agreed to interview and declined to distribute the questionnaire; and one declined the interview but agreed to distribute the questionnaire.

3.3 Data Gathering Process

The data and findings come from a variety of universities that each deliver their own particular model of Foundation Year provision. There is no one size fits all approach to Foundation Year programme development, and it is important to note that that the findings from the data reflects the diversity of programmes.

I conducted the data collection in four steps. My recruitment strategy was a combination of purposive sampling and snowballing. The first step consisted of interviews with academic staff and Foundation Year leaders from the universities described above. The second step involved coding the transcribed interviews, which led to step three, distributing a questionnaire to

current and former Foundation Year students at those same universities, asking them to evaluate the value of their experiences. Finally, in step four I analysed the data from the questionnaires. I used the data from the interviews and questionnaires to develop theories about the perceptions of value of Foundation Year programmes and to discuss how Foundation Year provision is situated in policy, in academic literature, and in the Widening Participation context.

The first and second steps, the qualitative strand of the process, included semi-structured interviews with academic staff and Foundation Year directors, as well as transcription and coding. The third and fourth steps, the quantitative strand of the process, involved gathering data through a questionnaire and analysis of the results. This sequence is represented in Figure 4 below.



Fig. 4: Overview of Design

I had expected an approximately 30% response rate from my call to interview and had intended to interview between four and six participants. The response rate was markedly higher than I anticipated: 68.75%. Rather than turn anyone away, I interviewed and distributed questionnaires to all universities who expressed interest in the project to maximise the validity of the overall findings through triangulation (Gomm, 2008) and to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the differences in Foundation Year provision. In addition, conducting as many as ten interviews allowed me to better understand the significance of each interview (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002) in the context of the larger narrative of Foundation Year programmes in Widening Participation.

The data is cross-sectional and was gathered virtually; interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams and questionnaires delivered through Qualtrics. Interviewees served as gatekeepers and propagators of the questionnaires to students.

3.3.1 Interview Format

I chose semi-structured interviews because I wanted to allow participants the space to explore the question of the value of Foundation Year provision through their own frames of reference (May, 2011). This also allowed practitioners to explain the particularities of their own experience of Foundation Year provision without constraint. With that in mind, I chose to follow Robson and McCartan's (2016) practice of using the interview questions as a guide but to allow the discussion to flow, based on the interests of the participant. In my email to participants, I noted that the interview itself would be informal and with little standardisation (Miles & Huberman, 1994) beyond the questions which I emailed to ahead of the interview. These semi-structured interviews took place over the course of two months. Nine out of ten interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards. For the unrecorded session, I took detailed notes during the interview and afterwards. Each session lasted one hour. There were nine main questions on the interview schedule (see Appendix A).

I interviewed practitioners about their teaching experience to date, allowing for an open-ended discussion about the structure of their courses and to reflection on the methods they use to combat low confidence in their students inside and outside the classroom. To build rapport with the interviewees (May, 2011), at the beginning of the interview I provided a brief overview of the project. I also described my familiarity with the subject matter as a result of my work as a Project Officer at the University of London, particularly at SOAS.

The semi-structured format allowed me to 'reflect back' (May, 2011) answers to participants as a way of seeking confirmation of my understanding of their views and seek elaboration where necessary. I asked one unplanned question (see Robson & McCartan, 2016) at the end of each interview: "If you had a 'soap box moment' related to Foundation Year provision, what would you say?" I was able to use the interviews together to develop a wide-ranging narrative about Foundation Year provision.

3.3.2 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was designed after interview transcription had been completed. There was a practical reason for doing so. Practitioners in universities agreed that sending a questionnaire during the assessment period could add to students' stress and result in a low rate of completion. They suggested distribution of the questionnaire occur in the month of June, after the assessment period.

Data from the interviews proved very useful. I was able to design the questionnaire such that answers would corroborate or disprove what academics and practitioners believed their students valued in Foundation Year provision. This method is advocated by Tashakkori and Teddlie who suggest that mixed methods researchers "continuously re-examine the results from one strand of a study compared to the results from another and...make changes both in the design and data collection procedures accordingly" (2015).

The questionnaire was produced on Qualtrics and composed of a series of multiple-choice questions, a matrix table, rating questions with sliders, and free text. It included a total of 25 questions and was prefaced by a required consent authorisation form at the beginning (see Appendix B for the questionnaire). It was sent via anonymous link to eleven Foundation Year practitioners who were asked to distribute the link among current and former Foundation Year students at their respective institutions; nine did so. The survey was completed by 61 students; 1 student abandoned the survey after starting. Given the method of distribution, I do not have a number of potential participants.

Apart from a question regarding consent, all the questions in the questionnaire were optional. The first section asked a series of demographic questions, including age, race, and whether the student was the first in their immediate family to go to university. The question about racial demographics is adapted from the ONS's demographics question (Office for National Statistics, n.d.), though I did include "Arab and Gulf States" as its own option instead of grouping it with

“Other”. The next section asked participants to reflect on how much they value different elements of the Foundation Year using a combination of multiple choice, scales, and free text questions. The final set of questions asked about the financial feasibility of an additional year of tuition and student loans. The questions were randomised on Qualtrics. The whole survey took on average 6 minutes to complete and could be taken on a computer or mobile device.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The research collection methods were approved by the University of Oxford’s ethical approval system which adheres to the *British Journal of Educational Research’s* regulations of ethical research (BERA 2018, see also Appendix C). I embrace the view that privacy is intrinsically connected to human dignity (Howe & Moses, 1999) and ensured an informed consent process that clearly explained how participants’ privacy will be protected through anonymisation and confidentiality. I am deeply aware of my own positionality as a female person of colour with an academic background in elite higher education institutions. I am committed to developing a practice of decolonised research that is holistic and considers the social and cultural particularities of my participants (González y González & Lincoln, 2006). Indeed, cultural emphases that emanate from backgrounds are particularly relevant in my research when analysing confidence strategies and students’ underlying motivations for going to university.

3.4.1 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Cohen et al (2018) observe that participant privacy can be maintained “through the use of aggregated or anonymized data”. Howe and Moses (1999) are more specific and recommend a two-pronged approach: “not gathering identity-specific data and not revealing identity-specific data”. Cohen et al (2018) suggest that if personal information from the participants must be gathered, then the ethical ‘tool’ of confidentiality should be enforced: that is, the researcher promises not to disclose information about a participant that could identify them or allow them to be traced.

Following those guidelines, I made sure to ask interview participants to sign Online Informed Consent forms (Appendix D) before the interview and additionally orally confirm or deny whether they wished to be recorded. The interview data itself was anonymised using aggregated data to develop findings and conclusions in order to maintain participant privacy. I followed Howe and Moses' (1999) recommendation and avoided asking interview participants questions related to demographics, though some chose to share that information unprompted. Sensitive information from interview participants is limited to name and email address, which are securely stored.

I wanted to ensure that interviewees were part of the research process and could be partners in the enterprise (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) not just subjects in this project. I made it clear to interview participants that I would be willing to share data, albeit in anonymised form, with those who expressed interest in the results. This abides by my own ethical feminist research practice in which I acknowledge the political, social, and economic implications of this research on participants and on wider society (Stanley & Wise, 1993). I do not wish for this research project to be an extraction of information from participants without reciprocity for their time and effort. My hope is that this works helps inform future research about Foundation Year provision.

For questionnaire participants, a consent form at the beginning asked students if they agreed with the standard gathering and storing of data that was required to complete the survey. The questionnaire was sent via anonymous hyperlink and not associated with email addresses or other identifying electronic IDs. The questions did not ask for any data that could link demographic data to particular individuals, thus ensuring anonymity for participants.

3.5 Data Analysis

The process of analysis occurred throughout the data gathering process. For the interviews, I used the coding style defined as ‘thematic analysis’ by Gomm (2008): a process of looking for themes that present themselves in interviews to compare and contrast responses from respondents. For questionnaire analysis, I used Qualtrics software to help analyse survey responses.

3.5.1 Transcription and Coding

Interview transcription took place before the design and delivery of the questionnaires as data from the interviews were used to assist in designing the questions. Nine of the interviews were transcribed manually from audio recordings into Microsoft Word. The tenth interview was not recorded, but I took comprehensive notes during the interview and immediately after. The codes themselves emanate from Wilson-Strydom and Walker’s article, “A Capabilities-Friendly Conceptualisation of Flourishing in and through Education” (2015) and Walker’s Capabilities and Functionings in Higher Education table in “Universities and a Human Development Ethics: A Capabilities Approach to Curriculum” (2012). I aggregate my own table of themes from both articles in Table 2, below.

Table 2: Themes Used for Coding Interview Transcriptions with Examples

Themes	Example
1. Having sufficient academic grounding in subjects to think critically and to recognize a wide range of perspectives	The idea is to improve the Maths and to give them the experience of preparing and succeeding in exams. And if they can show that across the Foundation Year, then they do well in First Year.
2. Feeling that one has a voice and the confidence to participate in learning	For some students, their main benefit from it is confidence. That has been the overwhelming feedback.

3. Not feeling undue anxiety or fear from the learning environment	Getting you used to being able to do a presentation without having days of anxiety beforehand.
4. Ability to think critically	The Reflective Learning element of that is to help students identify strengths and weaknesses. The idea of finding their place at university. And building confidence through that. Everybody has weaknesses. We can talk about those. We can look at those.
5. Ability to make and have good friends	We want the students to be happy. That's normal. So we look at the student experience, and forming this kind of community is very important to students.
6. Ability to pass classes and progress	Our overall aim is to make sure that they outperform their peers in Level 4 and beyond
7. Ability to develop good study skills	We focus very much on getting them to grips with the kind of skills they'll be required to use as they progress through their degree programme.

The themes in the left column serve as codes for my thematic analysis of interviews. As the coding process progressed, I broke down each theme to include a variety of sub-themes that further organised interviewees' quotes and ideas. For example, I broke down the first theme about academic grounding into the three sub-themes (see Table 3).

Table 3: Theme with Sub-themes

Theme: Having sufficient academic grounding in subjects to think critically and to recognize a wide range of perspectives		
Improving Subject Knowledge	Valuing Subject Knowledge	Preparing for Progression

3.5.2 Quantitative Analysis

For multiple-choice questions, matrix tables, and rating questions, I used Qualtrics to generate reports of answers to each question in a visual format, such as a chart or table. See Figure 5 below for an example.

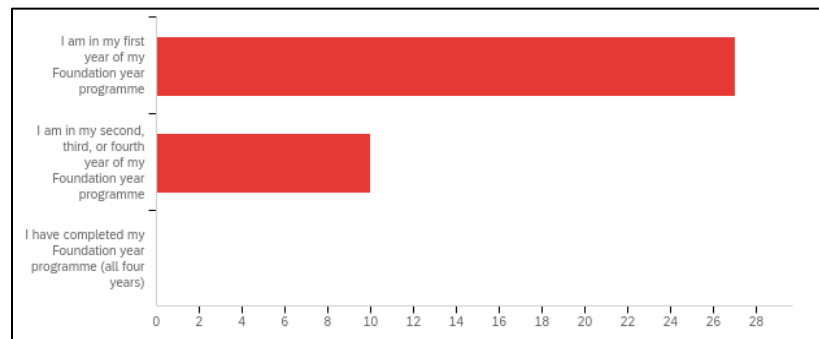


Fig. 5: Bar Chart with Survey Respondents' Year of Study

Qualtrics also calculated standard deviations and variance for each question. See Figure 6 below for an example.

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Please select the option that best suits you.	1.00	2.00	1.27	0.44	0.20	37

Fig. 6: Standard Deviation, Variance, and Counts for Survey Respondents' Year of Study

These reports served to make the questionnaire data analysable in conjunction with the coded thematic analysis of the interview transcriptions.

For free text questions, I grouped responses into overall thematic groups and then coded them using the same thematic codes as the interview transcription process shown in Table 2. As a result, I was able to examine data from qualitative and quantitative strands against the same rubric. This method is unique to a mixed methods approach because it provides a means to corroborate findings between data strands and enhance validity.

3.6 Limitations

Considering the number of Foundation Year undergraduate pathways in the UK currently numbers 1,182 at 52 different institutions (UCAS, n.d.), the interview and questionnaire sample size does not represent the true breadth of Foundation Year provision and cannot be considered representative of all Foundation Year programmes. The themes from this study, should, however prove to be useful as a basis for wider research on the impact of Foundation Year provision around the UK.

This study does not include interviews or focus groups with student participants. This means there that the understanding of student' perceptions of value is limited to the findings from the questionnaire. Focus groups and direct contact with students was not feasible within the scope of this project; the student questionnaires should be a useful starting point for developing further theories about student perceptions of value in higher education.

There are some ethical limitations to this study, particularly for student participants. As noted above, there is an ethical concern about asking current Foundation Year students (i.e., students in year one of their degree) to reflect on the value of the Foundation Year during the assessment period when they have not yet received their marks. I have tried to mitigate the impact of the latter in the questionnaire by limiting free text responses and by asking students to reflect primarily on generic skills development as opposed to subject-specific content.

Chapter 4: Findings

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative data strands are summarized below. In section 4.1, I discuss the quantitative findings from the student questionnaire. In section 4.2, I describe the findings from the interviews I conducted with practitioners from universities around England. The data from both strands are analysed together in Chapter 5.

4.1 Quantitative Findings

The quantitative findings were collected from students from 10 universities across England. The respondents included current Foundation Year students in their first year, Foundation Year students who had progressed onto Levels 4, 5, and 6, and former Foundation Year students who had already graduated. The following figure illustrates the spread of university level and corresponding ages. Approximately 53% of respondents were aged between 18-24 and were in their first year of Foundation Year provision. The remaining 47% fall into the mature student bracket. The spread of respondents is illustrated in Figure 7.

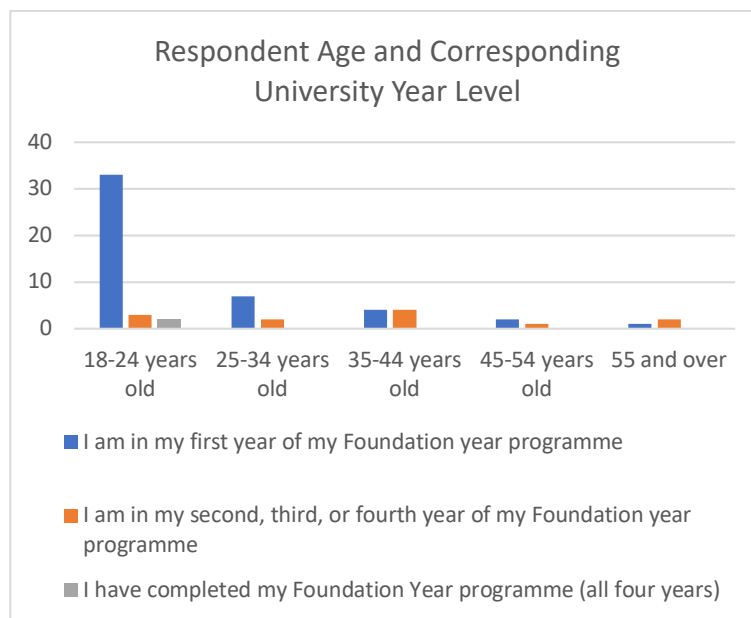


Fig. 7: Respondents' Age and Corresponding University Year Level

The only other demographic data I collected was respondents' ethnic groups. As Figure 8 below shows, most respondents (73%) identified as White, and the remainder were from all other ethnic groups.

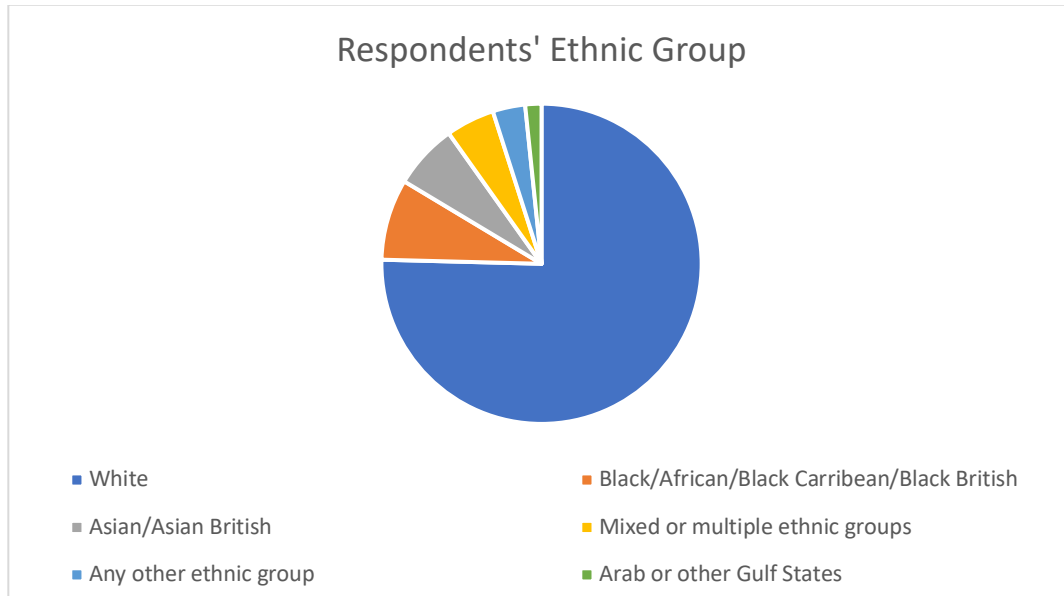


Fig. 8: Respondents' Ethnic Group

I asked participants to state if they were first-generation university students. Nearly 35% of respondents declared they were the first in their immediate family to go to university (Figure 9).

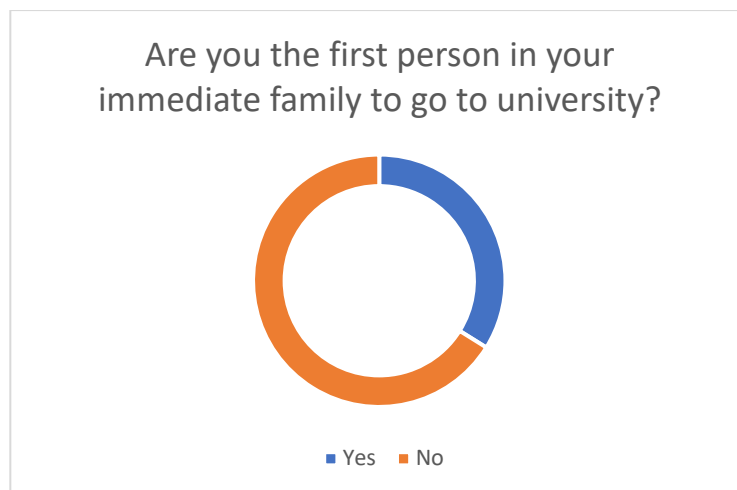


Fig. 9: Percentage of First-Generation Students

I then asked respondents to consider their reasons for choosing a Foundation Year programme and then to judge whether the programmes had delivered on the basis of those. The most common response for choosing a Foundation Year was “I did not do as well as I expected on my A-levels so I had to do a Foundation Year programme”. This was followed closely by several respondents who chose “Other” and explained that choosing a Foundation Year programme made sense for their circumstances because they had been away from education a long time. Only three respondents thought that the choosing a Foundation Year programme would give them better jobs prospect and eight who said that they chose Foundation Year provision to help them adapt to a university environment.

I asked respondents to evaluate whether their Foundation Year programme helped them in six ways: 1) to feel more confident; 2) to learn more about their subject area; 3) to learn study skills; 4) to increase familiarity with the university environment; 5) to make new friends; and 6) to think about their future careers. The answers are represented below in Figure 10. In all six areas, the majority of students responded in the affirmative. The most notable response is about study skills, the blue bar: 55 students responded that their Foundation Year helped them learn study skills and only two responded that it did not. Similarly, 50 respondents indicated that the Foundation Year helped them get more familiar with a university environment, while seven did not.

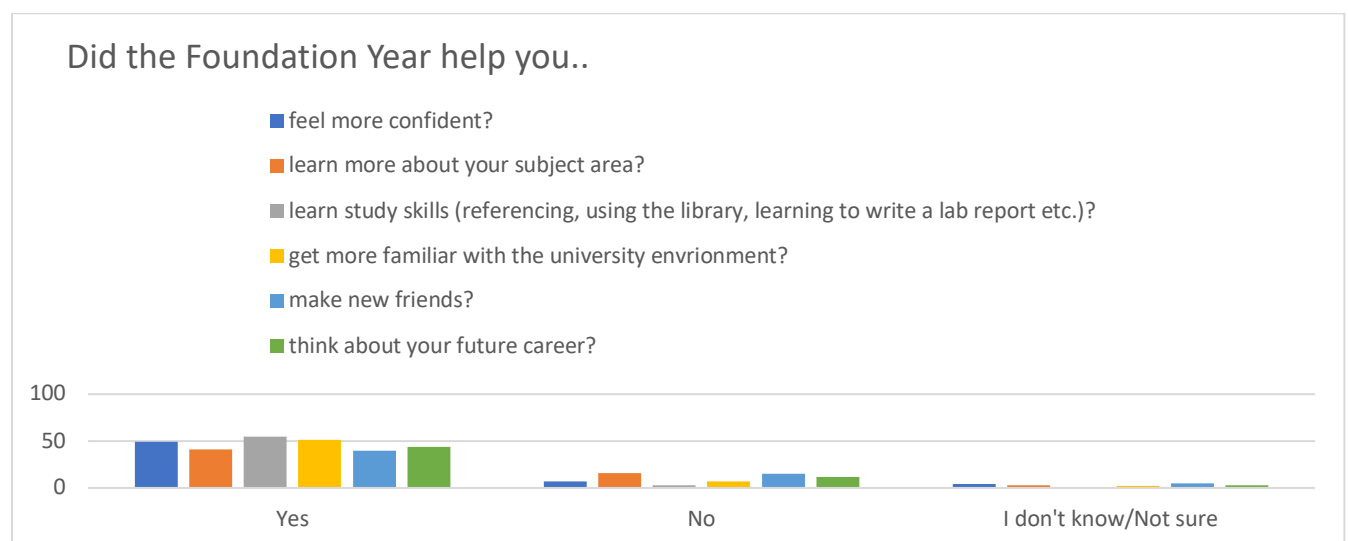


Fig. 10: Student Evaluation of Foundation Year Development Criteria

I also asked participants to expand on the specifics of the study skills component of Foundation Year provision by providing free text answers. The most common responses related to time management skills, academic writing skills, learning to reference and cite, learning how to use library resources, learning to write lab reports, and learning to prepare presentations with PowerPoint. Less commonly, answers mentioned “reading for purpose” and learning how to do data analysis.

As many as 49 students responded that the Foundation Year made them feel more confident, 7 responded that it did not. In a follow-up question, I asked students to rate their confidence levels at the start of the Foundation Year programme as compared to their confidence now. As the confidence meters below in Figure 11 illustrate, confidence levels rose on average from 2.55 out of 5.00 to 4.07 out of 5.00.



Fig. 11: Change in Confidence from beginning of Foundation Year to present

Since I expected the study skills component to feature prominently in the answers, I also asked respondents to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 how much they valued learning study skills. A total of 71% answered with an 8, 9, or 10. The remaining 29% answered with a rate of 5 to 7. Overall, respondents agreed that learning study skills are of substantial value.

When I asked whether being on a Foundation Year programme made them better students, 96% agreed that it did. When asked if tutors and lecturers supported them academically, a similarly high percentage of 93% agreed that they did.

I asked respondents whether they felt comfortable in a university environment. This question sought to gauge whether students had managed to find strategies to tackle imposter syndrome or similar feelings of 'otherness' at university. Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that they felt comfortable in a university environment (Figure 12). When read together with the increase in confidence that students reported (Figure 11), this shows that students are confronting imposter syndrome and low self-esteem in their Foundation Year programmes.

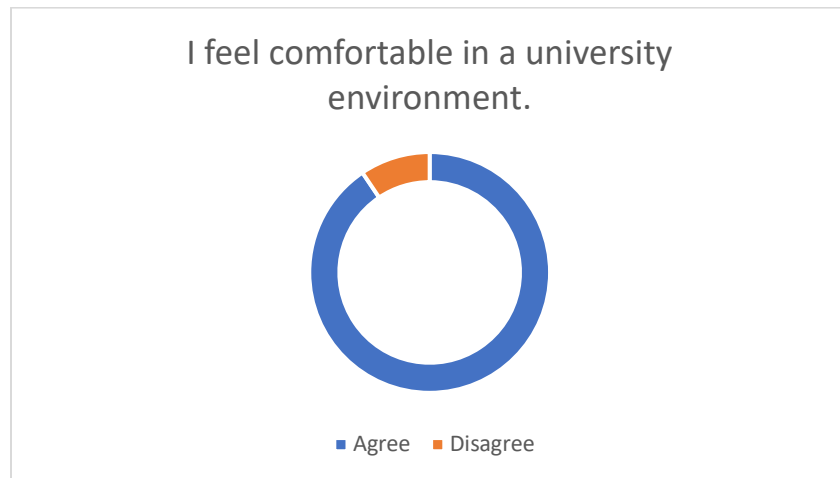


Fig. 12: Percentage of Students Comfortable in a University Environment

The next set of questions relate to how students rated the longer-term value of Foundation Year programmes. I asked respondents if Foundation Year programmes should continue to be run in the future. A little over 96% of students agreed they should (Figure 13).

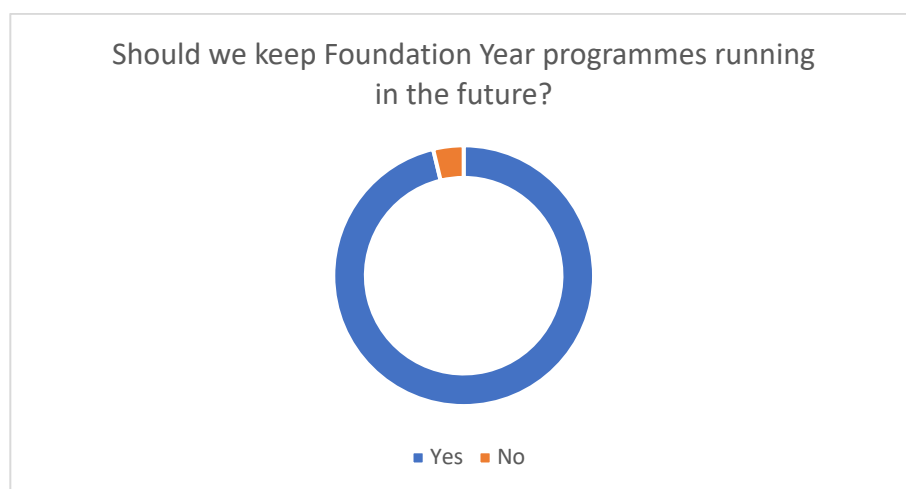


Fig. 13: Percentage of Students who think Foundation Year programmes should continue to be offered

I asked students to expand on why they believed Foundation Year programmes should remain or be discontinued. The most common reasons listed by those responding “Yes” related to access. One student, for example, wrote, “it allows students to go to university who otherwise wouldn’t go near it”. Another wrote, “it makes university more accessible. Builds the skills and confidence needed. I didn't fully understand how priceless the foundation year was going to be”. Respondents also recognised the value of Foundation Year provision for mature or underprepared students: “they are really useful and help older students, students without the right grades or subjects to get into university education”. The responses reveal an awareness on the part of respondents of the value of Foundation Year provision for themselves and also for their peers.

When asked about the single best thing they got out of their Foundation Year programme, respondents touched on academic skills, subject content, and social capital. One wrote,

Confidence - I'm not a particularly confident person and the foundation year has helped build up my confidence in my ability to communicate successfully in my assignments and with peers/staff.

Of the 49 responses, 22 of them included the word “confidence”. Another noted,

Confidence in my ability to complete my degree with skills that will benefit me in the workplace, such as critical thinking, complex analysis of data and literature, and time management skills.

The ability to raise confidence is evidently of substantial value to students on Foundation Year programmes. Other respondents observed that the Foundation Year helped them adapt to university life and to adjust to the rigours of academic study. One commented that they appreciated “the experience of university without the pressures of starting a first-year course straight away”.

The final question on the questionnaire related to financial value. Foundation Year courses are financed the same way undergraduate degrees are and consequently cost the same as a year of undergraduate study. I accordingly asked respondents to evaluate they believed their Foundation Year programme was (a) good value for money, (b) poor value for money or (c) a necessary cost. As Figure 14 below shows, 36% feel that the value for money is reasonable and 38% feel that it is not. However, 26% believe that value of for money is not relevant and are willing to bear the cost of the Foundation Year programme irrespective of the additional year's worth of loans.

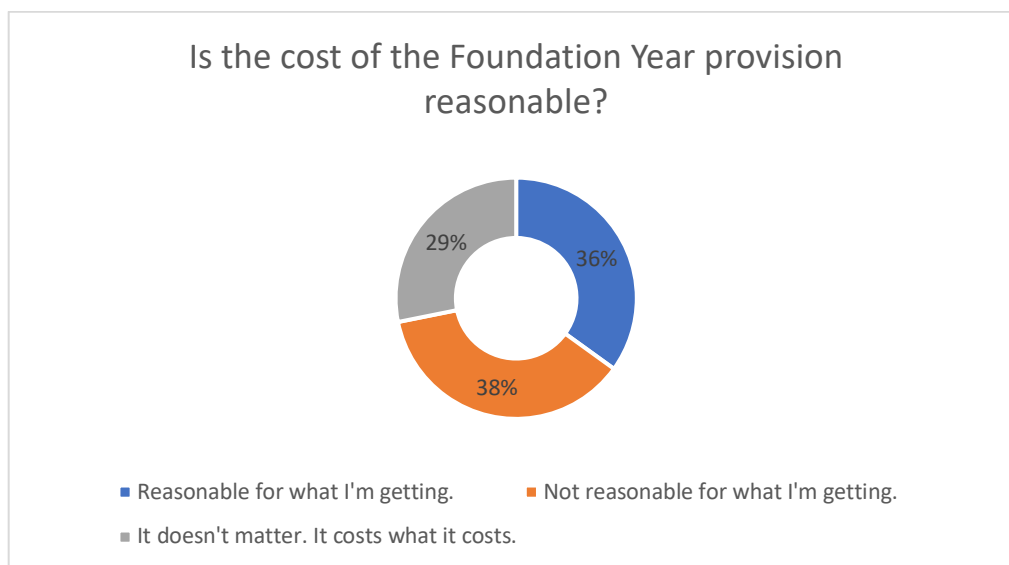


Fig. 14: Student Rating of the Value of Foundation Year Tuition

These findings provide the basis for an analysis of students' perceptions of the value of Foundation Years.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

I completed 10 interviews with Foundation Year practitioners from nine universities in England. Each interview was approximately one hour long and together they yielded a rich array of data about how practitioners perceived value and how they chose to impart their perceptions of value to students. The interviews validated the student-derived data while also providing context for each unique Foundation Year programme. I coded the raw interview data based on

a series of thematic codes that were developed by Walker (2012) and Walker and Wilson-Strydom (2015). The codes are replicated in Table 4 below. Some larger themes are broken down into sub-themes to further organise quotes and relevant ideas.

Table 4: Themes Used for Coding Interview Transcriptions

Themes
Having sufficient academic grounding in subjects to think critically and to recognize a wide range of perspectives
Feeling that one has a voice and the confidence to participate in learning
Not feeling undue anxiety or fear from the learning environment
Ability to think critically
Ability to make and have good friends
Ability to pass classes and progress
Ability to develop good study skills

I completed a short text analysis of some of the most frequently used words across all 10 interviews (Table 5). This provides a window into the most important themes from the perspective of Foundation Year practitioners. Skills and support are the most frequently occurring words, followed by access and confidence, similar to the data from the survey respondents. ‘One-to-one’ came up in eight interviews, an unexpected finding I discuss in more detail in section 4.2.4.

Table 5: Text Analysis of Most Frequent Words in Interview Data

Word	Frequency
Skills	70
Support	70
Access	51
Confidence	43
Opportunity	15
One-to-one	13

4.2.1 Academic Grounding

The first theme, “having sufficient academic grounding in subjects to think critically and to recognize a wide range of perspectives”, was of average importance to interviewees and came up intermittently throughout discussions. When it did, practitioners focussed on academic progression and the importance and value of developing some subject knowledge in the Foundation Year. One practitioner noted about a Maths course,

The idea is to improve the Maths and to give them the experience of preparing and succeeding in exams. And if they can show that across the Foundation Year, then they do well in First Year.

Similarly, another practitioner noted the importance of subject knowledge as a means for progression: “in the short term, they take away the knowledge and the competencies that they need to go into Level 4”. The bulk of discussions about academic grounding came out of conversations relating to the development of study skills and confidence in students, which interviewees argued was enhanced not by providing students with subject-specific knowledge, but rather by developing students’ study skills and confidence.

4.2.2 Confidence, Anxiety, Imposter Syndrome

Practitioners argued that the development of confidence was a major skill they wanted to develop in students. They said that if students felt valued and heard, if they were taught how to navigate the “rules” of a university, and if they were taught such logistical things as how to get to and from the library, then all the other academic things would fall into place. They maintained that in those components lie the value of Foundation Year programmes, even more so than subject content, because those are what enable students to flourish. They allow students to thrive in university environments with tailored support structures and active learning pedagogies that engage students from day 1.

Indeed, theme 2, “feeling that one has a voice and the confidence to participate in learning”, was the single most important thematic area for practitioners. This topic came up in every interview and was discussed by interviewees at length. I have broken down this theme into three sub-themes: (1) imposter syndrome; (2) confidence-building strategies; and (3) value of building self-esteem (Table 6).

Table 6: Themes, Sub-themes and Examples for ‘Student Confidence to Participate in Learning’

Theme	Sub-Theme	Example
Feeling that one has a voice and the confidence to participate in learning	Imposter Syndrome	“They just seem to think they’re not quite good enough, although they are”.
	Confidence-building strategies	“One of the things we’ve tried to work on, is developing people’s confidence by looking at the assessment process, in the context of people’s growing confidence”.
	Value of Building Self-Esteem	“For some students, their main benefit from it is confidence. That has been the overwhelming feedback”.

Practitioners noted that imposter syndrome was a real and substantive problem for Foundation Year students and, unless addressed, could have negative downstream consequences for student performance and progression. One practitioner noted, “It’s not always the case, but often the case that students start in a place where they’re told they’re not good enough.” Not being good enough is a recurring topic and one that practitioners were convinced had significant impact on student confidence levels:

A majority of Foundation Year students have been told that you haven’t met A-level recruitment so back you go to Foundation. So, they come to us with a confidence hit.

They're not happy to begin with. They think 'this is not for me'. So for us, it's a difficult task to make it interesting and engaging enough for all.

Practitioners maintained that imposter syndrome and low confidence were, and continue to be, a barrier to student success and progression. They articulated the importance of understanding "where students were coming from" and of showing empathetic awareness of the difficulties they may be facing in a higher education environment.

Some students experience debilitating anxiety that impacts their ability to produce good academic work or perform to a high standard. One practitioner said that they try to get students "used to being able to do a presentation without having days of anxiety beforehand". Such confidence-building strategies in teaching, assessment, and pastoral support were widely discussed by practitioners and were examples of some practical ways in which they helped support students in their transition to university. Several practitioners noted that assessments were a particularly difficult obstacle for students with low self-esteem. As a result, some programmes overhauled their assessment processes to include assessment by engagement or continuous assessment. Other programmes increased support and exam preparation to help students improve their confidence before the real assessment. One practitioner noted that they reiterate the importance of failure as a part of success:

They're very, very nervous, but the point is, it's a safe environment in which to fail. And that's what I keep saying to them. We know they will be picking up all the way through that semester that failure is a part of leadership.

The practitioners argued that these strategies are key to student success. They told me repeatedly that students value confidence-building strategies in Foundation Year programmes over everything else, including academic content:

And then, interestingly, come Year 2 and 3, these are the students who will stop you in the corridor and say, Oh my God, thank you!'. And at that stage, they are not talking about essay-writing skills. They're saying, 'I'm so much more confident.' But they don't see that until they start Year 1.

For some students, their main benefit from it is confidence. That has been the overwhelming feedback.

They say the imposter syndrome has never gone away, but they've got strategies to cope with the feeling. They celebrate when they've done well. 'All this hard work has done it. I am worth being here'.

This finding is corroborated by students who overwhelmingly noted that developing confidence was extremely important to them (see Figures 10, 11 and 12 above) and considered it to be a *raison d'être* of Foundation Year provision.

4.2.3 Study Skills

Interviewees emphasised that the development of study skills was an essential and unique component of Foundation Year provision. This is seen in Table 5 above, which shows that skills and support were the two most frequently repeated words across all 10 interviews. Foundation Year practitioners spend much more time with students on mock exams, homework, worksheets, and formative assessments. Students, in turn, receive substantial feedback on their academic work before assessment and are therefore clear on where they stand academically. One practitioner was quick to point out that Foundation Years are unique in this respect; this support-feedback loop is atypical in undergraduate study where the level of feedback is generally low and often limited to once-a-term. One practitioner noted, "I do believe the academic skills probably comes before the subject. So I think if you enable that structure, the subject should then come quite naturally".

The practitioners spoke at length about teaching students the skills to progress, regardless of their subject area. One reported that the focus of the Foundation Year programme was to get students to grips with the kinds of skills they would need in order to progress to Levels 4, 5, and 6. Another reported,

When students go into Level 4, they feel that they are fully equipped with university life skills. So they've got life skills as well university life skills. And they seem to do quite well.

Skills development refers to a combination of things. Students learn how to write lab reports and essays, and learn how to deliver presentations, all with extremely tailored and bespoke support. Other non-tangible skills include how to find the library, how to make appointments with lecturers during office hours, and how to develop research skills. As one practitioner stressed,

If you can help someone develop the skills needed to be able to research pretty well, to be able to understand what is good information and what is bad information, and how to then create an argument with that, and then the drive and the motivation to succeed, they're going to be able to do that content gap themselves!

4.2.4 Pastoral Support

Pastoral support came up in every interview with many practitioners noting that it was an integral element in Foundation Year provision. They averred that pastoral support gave students a structure that allowed them to address issues of confidence and low self-esteem in healthy and safe ways. These practitioners talked about using strategies such as one-to-one meetings, catch-up sessions, academic support modules, and progression meetings tailored to each student. They described these as helpful for students to develop academically and to grow their confidence enough to seek support as needed over their entire undergraduate career.

One interviewee was emphatic about pastoral care: “pastoral support is absolutely huge and paramount”. Another said that one-to-one tutorials with lecturers was something students appreciated in their Foundation Year: “they liked the frequent personal tutorials. We do two types of tutorials. We call them 1-to-1’s, they’re pastoral stuff. They can be short as ‘How are you doing...’”.

It is clear from the data that pastoral support is included in every Foundation Year programme strategy. Practitioners have determined that students require additional support and have accordingly incorporated a range of support structures for students to access. This support is extremely well-received by students.

Support provision raises an important question. I asked interviewees if support at the Foundation Year level carried through to Levels 4, 5, and 6. The answers varied by institution, but overall, there was general agreement that pastoral care at the Foundation Year level was much higher than in the other three years. Some practitioners wished that increased pastoral care in departments at Levels 4, 5, and 6 to become the new norm for undergraduate provision. Others observed that substantial pastoral support at the Foundation Year was designed to help students learn about university support structures and thereby lead them not to require as much departmental support in Levels 4, 5, and 6. Regardless, there was a concern that strong support during the Foundation Year followed by little to no support in subsequent years was jarring for students and that a smoother support transition ought to be developed.

4.3 Additional Findings

The data revealed some unexpected findings relating Widening Participation, innovation, and belonging.

4.3.1 Widening Participation

Students and practitioners confirmed that Foundation Year provision provides a pathway for students to go to university *who otherwise would not have gone at all*. I asked students explicitly if they would have attended university without a Foundation Year programme (Figure 15):

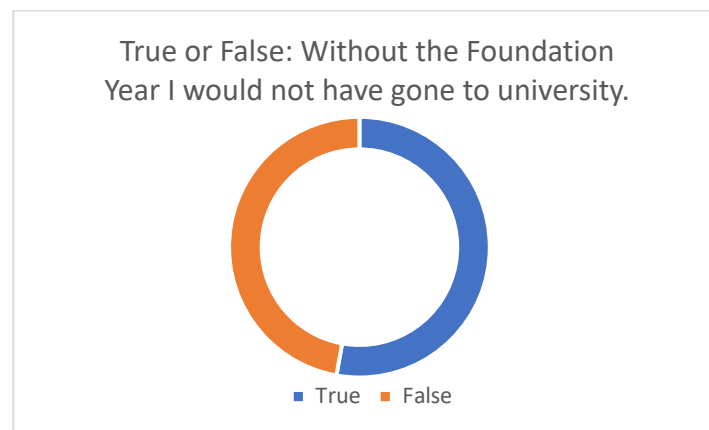


Fig. 15: Percentage of Students who would have/would not have gone to university without the Foundation Year

As the results show, over half the respondents stated that they would not have attended university at all were it not for a Foundation Year. In other words, no other pathway, including the Access to Higher Education Diplomas in Further Education Colleges, provide the same kind of support, academic skills development, and confidence-raising strategies that Foundation Year programmes provide.

There was also substantial discussion about general Widening Participation objectives in relation to Foundation Year programmes. This is not unexpected due to the nature of Foundation Year provision as a way for universities to achieve their objectives in their Access

and Participation plans. Most of the participants stated that the percentage of students from underrepresented backgrounds was higher on their Foundation Year programmes than in the rest of their university.

4.3.2 Innovation

Interviewees discussed the importance of Foundation Year programmes as innovative change-makers within their universities. One practitioner noted, “we’ve had the Vice Chancellor saying, ‘We need to run Levels 4, 5, 6 more like the Foundation Year where students get engaged and stimulated and confidence is built’”. Another was keen to highlight that their innovative model of teaching is also extending beyond Foundation Years to other departments in the university. One interviewee noted,

Even the faculties are changing. Didactic teaching is out the window. It’s only used for one specific purpose and that’s knowledge giving. The kind of teaching we do is workshop-based. It’s full of flipped learning, a lot of technology so students can answer questions anonymously using tech. Lots of group work, some role play, lots of Q and A.

One practitioner discussed the balancing of power dynamics in her teaching style:

it was very much about, how do we work with this group of students who...not to position them as lacking in some way... but to try to learn with them and from them while also trying to build their social capital and human capital? So it was a lot of work to do with ‘Let’s understand your journey so far; how have you arrived here? What’s been your experience of education? What are you hoping to get out of your degree?’

The teaching style described above is reflective of a strategy that understands the complexity of the student’s individual life circumstances and adapts the pedagogy to match. The teaching methods are adapted every year to incorporate feedback into their year-on-year development.

These engaging and innovative styles of teaching are slowly but surely drifting into other departments and helping universities innovate.

4.3.3 Belonging

The concept of belonging was raised in four interviews. It was the view of some practitioners that the development of students' sense of belonging at university was part of the remit of Foundation Year provision. Belonging is related to confidence, imposter syndrome, and self-esteem; it makes sense, therefore, that Foundation Year practitioners have noticed the impact that a lack of belonging may have on student success. These practitioners stated that their main strategy for imbuing a sense of belonging was to develop strong cohorts. Some universities run long induction sessions with group activities. Others create small subject-based groups so students can all take the same courses together. Yet others plan social activities such as eating together or attending events together as a way of fostering belonging and a sense of community. The practitioners also noted that nurturing a sense of belonging helped to improve student resilience. Students who felt that they belonged were better able to understand the structures of the university and navigate those structures effectively. Furthermore, fostering a sense of belonging effectively helped improve student retention and progression.

4.3.4 Summary of Findings

The research questions ask how both students and practitioners perceive the value of Foundation Year programmes, and how practitioners impart value through their teaching and support. The findings reveal that students and practitioners have strongly positive views on the value of Foundation Year programmes and overwhelmingly seek to defend and support the provision as a pathway for prospective undergraduates.

It is evident from both strands of data that Foundation Year programmes help students develop confidence and strong study skills in order to be successful in their chosen academic subject.

Practitioners support both these agendas by providing students with tailored academic and pastoral support throughout the Foundation Year and beyond. As a result, students note that their confidence markedly increases during the Foundation Year programme and that their level of comfort in a university environment is high. With respect to financial value, over 50% of students would continue to take out loans for Foundation Year provision regardless of the cost of the “extra” year. There is little said about academic subject content from students or practitioners, which suggests that non-subject specific values are far more significant.

Some 96% of students agree that Foundation Year programmes should continue as a pathway of undergraduate provision because it provides an alternative means to get into university for students with poor A-level grades, other qualifications, or challenging life circumstances. And 36% of students also argue that they would not have gone to university at all had it not been for a Foundation Year programme. This speaks to the programmes’ accessibility and ability to create opportunities for individuals who might not otherwise go to university. The mature students, part of a growing population, observed that Foundation Year programmes give them the chance to adapt to university life more gently than a direct-entry undergraduate pathway might. As one mature student noted, Foundation Years programmes “changes lives”.

The practitioners all shared the belief that students deserved maximal opportunities to go to university and to be well-supported on their academic journeys. They spoke of their ability to be adaptable as teachers and mentors, and about how Foundation Year programmes served as innovators in their respective institutions in teaching and provision of support, notwithstanding the fact that the programmes are all different. The findings show that Foundation Year programmes provide a unique mix of academic content and support strategies not available in any other academic pathway available in higher education.

These findings and conclusions are discussed more fully the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, I analyse the qualitative and quantitative strands of data using the Capability Approach evaluative framework. As the discussion illustrates, meaningful participation and student well-being are essential components of Foundation Year programmes and are considered deeply valuable to students and practitioners alike. Students express strong support for Foundation Year provision in six key areas and ultimately support the continuation of the programmes at universities in England.

In what follows, I briefly describe the evaluative approach that underpins my discussion. I use the seven themes from my data analysis to evaluate the value of Foundation Year provision for student success in higher education and critique the Augar Report's argument that Foundation Years are a poor investment for students and government. I suggest that if policy makers evaluate Foundation Year provision using holistic frameworks such as the Capability Approach, they would better recognise the value of Foundation Years in British higher education and likely come to a different conclusion about their value.

5.1 Evaluative Framework: The Capability Approach

The findings of this study are evaluated using a series of capability themes. In the language of the Capability Approach, these themes are called “complex functionings” (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993, p. 31). The themes cover a range of functionings, namely sufficient academic grounding, confidence, not feeling undue anxiety, ability to think critically, ability to make good friends, ability to progress, and strong study skills. The evaluation of Foundation Year programmes using these themes can help us better understand how Foundation Year practitioners support students. I pay particular attention to “meaningful participation” and “well-being for the student” (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007).

5.2 Evaluation of Capability Themes

5.2.1 Academic Grounding

Strong academic grounding is a fundamental theme for student success in both the short term and the long term. Success is defined as a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, strong grades in assessment, and a clear desire and ability to progress through the programme and graduate. The data show that a common reason for choosing a Foundation Year was because students did not do as well as they had expected on their A-levels. Providing students with a comprehensive foundation for academic subjects is therefore particularly important for them to be able to progress to the higher levels of degree study.

The data show that Foundation Year programmes include teaching and learning strategies that imbue strong academic grounding for students. One practitioner noted, “in the short term, they take away the knowledge and the competencies that they need to go into Level 4”. This short-term goal was repeated by many Foundation Year practitioners and suggests that student confidence in subject-matter is important. Students agreed that developing subject knowledge was important before progressing onto Level 4 and that the academic grounding from the Foundation Year helped them succeed in Levels 5 and 6.

In a 2-year mixed methods study at the University of Plymouth, Craven and Sharp (2018) tested the hypothesis that their Mathematics Foundation Year programme could provide a better academic experience for students with a history of poor maths attainment than the traditional A-level route. They found through student feedback and questionnaires that their Maths Foundation Year programme “does provide a thorough grounding in Mathematics knowledge and rigour”: 71% of students made positive reference to how the programme helped prepare them for future academic study (2018). Similar to the practitioners in this study, Craven and Sharp utilised innovative teaching strategies, in their case a flipped classroom technique, to deliver their programme. It is noteworthy that their case study involved a STEM subject; the evaluation of academic grounding will necessarily look different for humanities and social

science degrees. Nevertheless, academic grounding in Foundation Year programmes is clearly important and valuable to students and imparted by practitioners in a range of supportive ways.

5.2.2 Confidence

The second theme relates to the importance of giving students voice and growing their confidence in order for them to participate fully in learning. As noted in the previous chapter, confidence came up repeatedly in student questionnaires and in interviews. It is important to consider the development of confidence as a crucial capability for students, especially given the make-up of the student population on Foundation Year programmes. As Hale (2018) notes, several underlying issues affect Foundation Year student populations more than others:

Foundation Year students have far higher levels of disabilities, mental health problems, specific learning disabilities and ill health than the wider student population – frequently the reason that they did not follow a standard path from school to university – and will bring with them lower levels of social capital and its concomitant confidence and self-esteem than their more ‘conventional’ peers (Hale, 2018).

It is imperative that we ask not only *if* students are able to achieve outcomes, but *how* they achieve them. Raising student confidence is evidently one way to promote good student outcomes in exams and other assessment areas. In interviews, practitioners noted that confidence is achieved by using support structures that include developing students’ study skills as well as reminding them that they are valued members of the community. The data from students illustrate that this is working: student believe their confidence was quite low upon arrival to campus (on average 2.55 out of 5.00) and rose as a consequence of participating in the Foundation Year (4.07 out of 5.00) (Figure 11). This finding is consistent with the results from the mixed methods study about belonging and confidence in Foundation Year students in UK and Irish universities conducted by Sullivan et al (2019b). They report that students’ sense of

belonging and confidence “increased significantly” over the first year as a result of building relationships with other students.

There are various ways to improve confidence in students. One practitioner suggested that it was important to replace difficult negative academic experiences from the past with new positive ones in the present. This is especially important for Foundation Year students with poor prior academic performance. Allowing students the chance to explore their subject without fear helps develop confidence to ask seemingly “stupid” questions and promotes academic interests in a way that is supportive.

The development of confidence is enormously important and valuable to students and practitioners alike. Confidence and voice are important functionings that allow students the best opportunity to succeed at university and seek out knowledge that is of interest to them.

5.2.3 Not Feel Undue Anxiety or Fear

Sen introduced well-being into discussions of evaluation in his Dewey Lectures (1984). He and Martha Nussbaum then expanded significantly on the concepts of well-being, agency, and value in their book, *The Quality of Life* (1993). They argue that the Capability Approach can evaluate a person’s well-being through functionings such as being adequately nourished, having self-respect, or being able to participate freely in society (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993). Such functionings can be adapted for higher education to include being able to speak freely in the classroom (within reason) without fear of judgement and being able to participate in academic social activities without undue anxiety.

Indeed, practitioners recognised anxiety in students and spoke about finding ways to minimise student stress. One noted that she tries to minimise anxiety by teaching students the rules and regulations of university life:

teaching them all the new rules and regulations; how assessment works; what you're expected to do; how you're expected to behave. All those kinds of informal regulations that you need to get used to in exactly the same way as you would do in terms of going to a new job.

Practitioners also argued that they were learning to adapt to students' changing needs in assessment. Not everyone can be assessed through exams and there is not always a need to do so. Innovative forms of assessment are becoming more commonplace in Foundation Year programmes and, in some cases, are also expanding to departments with direct-entry students. As one practitioner noted, "we began to realize we shouldn't be forcing anybody to do anything that's making them feel uncomfortable. We need to embrace more the student that is an introvert".

The findings from practitioners illustrate how well they recognise students' needs. Students indirectly point out that such strategies are working: when asked what kinds of skills they learned on their Foundation Year, students replied with "presenting confidently", "cooperation" and "social skills". In turn, such confidence and cooperation help students participate meaningfully in the classroom and thus take advantage of opportunities to learn skills that improve their outcomes without fear of judgement.

5.2.4 Ability to Think Critically

Critical thinking is a central component of the Capability Approach, especially for Nussbaum (2011), who argues it helps develop more engaged citizens. One Foundation Year director in the Arts and Humanities concurs, maintaining that for his programme, critical thinking is central. Though considered a "soft skill", critical thinking is held in high regard and often invoked when defending the value of education at American liberal arts colleges (see Nussbaum, 1997; Small, 2013; Zakaria, 2015). One finding of this study is that practitioners defend Foundation Years in England on the same grounds as advocates of liberal arts colleges in the United States. In both,

developing critical thinking, independent thinking, and logical argumentation dominate the pedagogy. Indeed, when evaluating Foundation Year provision, many students point out that critical thinking is a skill they learned and valued. One student wrote that her Foundation Year gave her “confidence in my ability to complete my degree with skills that will benefit me in the workplace, such as critical thinking, complex analysis of data and literature, and time management skills”. This suggests that students value critical thinking as a tool that contributes to immediate academic success on exams.

5.2.5 Ability to Make and Have Good Friends

The socialization element of Foundation Year programmes features prominently in both data strands. Every practitioner said that developing a cohesive cohort is important in helping students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, acquire a network that could help alleviate challenges such as imposter syndrome or anxiety of being in an unfamiliar environment. One practitioner noted the importance of building cohorts from the very first week:

We start the semester with Escape rooms! We pay for it, but it’s a very worthwhile investment. They thoroughly enjoy it. They refer back to it throughout the whole year about meeting people. About being able to communicate confidently. About knowing that when they start, they’ve got contacts and they can actually work in those teams if they want to.

Another said: “we have a group of support tutors who have arranged quiz nights and lunchtime meetings, lunchtime socials, and so on, just to form a bit of community.” Tinto has argued that social integration is crucial to student success (see 1975, 1993, 2006) and would agree with practitioners’ rationale for cohort building. He argues that students, especially those from backgrounds without strong links to university environments, may be at risk of social isolation. Students who take advantage of the Foundation Year as a Widening Participation programme

fall into Tinto's at-risk category. Universities must support student social integration, Tinto argues, or risk "social malintegration" (1993, p.102) that could lead to attrition or even more dangerous forms of social isolation such as violent behaviour or suicide. Most students in this study said that social development occurred on their programme: 40 (out of 55) indicated that their Foundation Year helped them make new friends.

Socialization is a missing element in other value-based frameworks, such as neoliberal theory and human capital theory, even though it is a fundamental part of higher education. It can be argued that a successful university life and academic achievement are impossible without the ability to make good friends and to develop strong support networks with peers.

5.2.6 Ability to Pass Classes and Progress

Passing classes and progressing is a basic outcome that both students and universities want to maximize. There is a large and growing body of literature that looks at uneven progression rates within communities of colour and other disadvantaged groups as compared to the progression rates of white peers (see Ahmed 2012; Arday & Mirza, 2018; EHRC, 2019). There is merit, therefore, in evaluating progression in Foundation Year programmes. Several evaluations have been taking place in some universities in the UK and some positive results have been identified. For example, Chivers (2019) identified three areas at the University of South Wales—admissions, applicant days, and induction—where the Foundation Year programme improved retention and progression. She observes that there is no one size fits all approach. Rather, she uses the analogy of a car: "each institution needs to lift up the bonnet to critically examine its engine and conduct a critical analysis of systems and processes that relate to student support and learning experiences" (Chivers, 2019). I noted above that practitioners identified low confidence and imposter syndrome as barriers to student success and progression; they also singled out a lack of subject knowledge. To combat this, some have started teaching the subject matter "from the very beginning at GCSC level". Doing so helped improve progression for

Foundation Year students to Levels 4, 5, and 6 and maximized students' opportunity take advantage of their programme.

5.2.7 Ability to Develop Good Study Skills

Wilson-Strydom (2015) has argued that a Capability-informed approach to evaluating universities should “invest in interventions that seek to overcome factors identified as corrosive disadvantages”. This is exactly what Foundation Year programmes do with their study skills provision. Indeed, learning study skills was the most commonly reported response in the questionnaire and one of the most frequently repeated phrases in the interviews. It is not surprising that students and practitioners both value study skills; what is surprising is the extent to which study skills were valued as an essential component of Foundation Year provision. Study skills can help students overcome disadvantages, such as not knowing how to study for an exam or not knowing how to use the library (Wilson-Strydom, 2015).

Study skills are often overlooked in higher education provision and are often assumed already to be part of a student's toolbox. Yet, every practitioner in this study spoke at length about giving students the skills to progress, regardless of their subject area. Indeed, developing good study skills is an integral component of Foundation Year provision. Foundation Year practitioners do not assume students know how to study or how to navigate an academic environment. This speaks to a wider and a more holistic understanding of the student body on Foundation Year programmes, which in capabilitarian terms, is essential. Many of the students who choose Foundation Year programmes would not be able to flourish at university without having learned basic functionings such as how to write an essay, how to reference, how to use the library, or how to write in basic academic language. Embedding such study skills into the strategy of Foundation Year development maximises students' chances of success.

5.3 Foundation Years and Widening Participation

The data show that over half the respondents would not have attended university at all were it not for the Foundation Year. This is a major finding and supports the argument that Foundation Year provision does indeed expand access to university for students in a way that Access to Higher Education diplomas delivered through Further Education Colleges do not. As the Office for Students report (2019) notes, Foundation Year programmes and Access to Higher Education diplomas are not like-for-like in terms of their outcomes or their delivery. Students stated that they chose Foundation Year programmes because they missed their conditional offers and still felt strongly about attending a university. It would appear, therefore, that Foundation Year programmes play a vital role for improving social access and mobility.

Sen argues that different people's abilities to convert opportunities into positive outcomes are a result of different "conversion factors". Conversion factors are "personal heterogeneities, environmental diversities, variations in social climate, differences in relational perspectives, and distribution within the family (Sen, 1999, p. 71) that impact whether a person can take full advantage of an opportunity. The Capability Approach differs from other evaluative frameworks because it factors in a person's ability not only to have an opportunity, but to take advantage of it. Figure 16 below illustrates the difference between equity and equality:

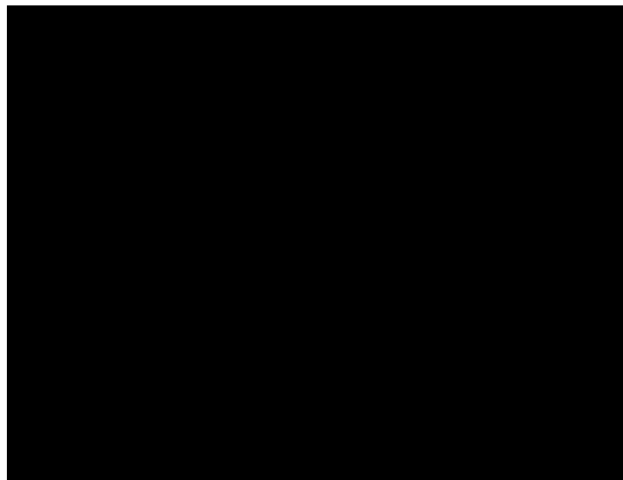


Fig 16: Equality vs Equity

Courtesy of Interaction Institute for Social Change

On the left, we see that all three people have the opportunity to attend the sports match but not the same ability to see the game. On the right, we see the same situation with boxes added, representing, for example, social access programmes to help each person take advantage of the opportunity to enjoy the game. The fence is representative of structural issues that cannot simply be torn down. Social access programmes must be designed by those in relative positions of power for participants with varying degrees of (dis)advantage to take advantage of opportunities. Foundation Year programmes help convert the opportunity of going to university into a positive outcome through progression and, ultimately, graduation.

5.4 Summary of Capabilitarian Evaluation

The data show that students perceive Foundation Year programmes to have value in six major areas: developing student confidence, developing familiarity with university environments, bolstering academic grounding, developing friends and social connections, helping solidify future career choices, and enhancing study skills. These values are evident in the findings from both the qualitative and quantitative strands of data. Wilson-Strydom (2016) designed her Capability Approach framework to “think about university access in new ways”. Her approach has illuminated ways of thinking about Foundation Year provision without succumbing to careless monolithic thinking. The Capability Approach evaluation recognises meaningful participation and well-being for students evident in all seven evaluation criteria and furthermore, shows that students and practitioners alike consider factors not related to financial value in their assessment of value.

The capabilitarian evaluation critiques and ultimately disagrees with the recommendations in the Augar Report that contends that Foundation Year provision is a poor investment for students and government. Their recommendations stem from an evaluation centred on the logics of neoliberal theory and human capital theory—that is, an evaluation that foregrounds notions such as high and low value degrees and value-for-money, ultimately reducing the value of Foundation Year programmes to purely its financial considerations. The data from this study,

though limited, shows that students do not see Foundation Year programmes as exploitative or of low value; the results highlight quite the opposite. While it is true the programmes may also provide universities with additional revenue, students report that there is undeniable value in a pathway that provides access to university for those who may not otherwise have an option. On that basis, Foundation Year programmes do indeed achieve a Widening Participation objective and do provide a unique mix of academic content and strategies for success unavailable in another other higher education pathway.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this chapter, I suggest avenues for further research, discuss answers to my research questions, and conclude with this study's contribution to scholarship.

6.1 Avenues for Further Research

Research must be undertaken comparing Foundation Year provision at different institutions, so that there can be more in-depth analysis of the relative merits of different programmes and models. Some Foundation Year practitioners have begun this work and have published their findings in the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network*. They have looked at critical issues such as class (Ferguson, 2019), pedagogy (Seal & Parkes, 2019), and transition (Bartels-Hardage, 2018; Chivers, 2019), among others. Their work reveals the complexity and variety of Foundation Year provision. A better understanding of that variety may lead to coherent ways of standardising Foundation Year provision across the sector, making it easier for students to navigate it and policy makers to regulate it.

More research will also need to be conducted directly with Foundation Year students, in the form of focus groups or case studies, for a more comprehensive understanding of student perception of the value of Foundation Year provision. This study has only been able to scratch the surface. While I did find that 62% of students felt that financial value was either good or irrelevant, 38% felt that it was a poor investment. It is worth understanding why almost 4 in 10 students regard the Foundation Year as a poor investment, in order to be able to improve provision. At the same time, 96% of the students in this study believe that Foundation Year provision should continue, which directly contradicts the recommendation in the Augar Report that they should be discontinued for financial reasons. Coordinated research needs to be conducted with students, practitioners, and policy makers to arrive at a better understanding of the implications of the debt burden as it relates to Foundation Year provision.

6.2 Concluding Thoughts

It is striking the extent to which both student participants and practitioners defended Foundation Year provision. The same arguments used to defend social sciences, humanities, and arts programmes are used to defend Foundation Year programmes in every subject, including STEM. Practitioners described their teaching methodology and practice in similar ways to those in use in liberal arts institutions in the US. Indeed, Foundation Year teaching methodology is suited to the student's individual circumstances and life context; the education is pluralistic; and the programme encourages students to think critically about their subject matter in relation to the wider world. This is especially relevant in the context of Widening Participation. Foundation Year programmes offer students from disadvantaged backgrounds, or those returning to education after a long time, the opportunity to get a university degree. Noticeably absent from the discussion on the part of all participants is the potentially exploitative nature of Foundation Year programmes.

This study has evaluated Foundation Year programmes using the holistic Capability Approach and concluded that the provision is highly valued by students and universities alike. The programmes serve as valuable tools for Widening Participation for underrepresented groups and provide students with the tools to succeed in academic environments. The study has identified the enormous value of the provision and counters the neoliberal evaluations of Foundation Year programmes invoked by policy makers, encouraging them instead to evaluate the provision using a more holistic measure. Value for money is undoubtedly important to students and to government, but so is retention, progression, critical thinking, social mobility, and lifelong learning. Foundation Year provision creates the conditions for all of these and their value needs to be recognised and properly evaluated.

My first research question asked, "How do current and former Foundation Year students in mass higher education institutions perceive the value of Foundation Year' programmes?" The data shows that students perceive that value in multiple ways: they appreciate the academic foundation; they value the ability to adjust, with support, to university environments; they

value the social element of making friends and developing networks; they value learning to bolster confidence and gain study skills.

The second question asked, “How do Foundation Year practitioners define the value of Foundation Year programmes for students and what strategies are used by Foundation Year practitioners to impart value?”. The findings show that practitioners see value in the Foundation Year’s ability to promote access to higher education and to develop critical thinking skills and confidence. The programmes also help students with poor academic qualifications or mature students who are returning to education. Practitioners impart value using support strategies and teaching methods that help students flourish and ultimately succeed at university, and as informed citizens in society.

This study has sought to address the gap in the literature on Foundation Years by studying mass higher education institutions who deliver Foundation Year provision as an undergraduate pathway with fee structures identical to other direct-entry routes. This study has sought to contribute to the discussion on Foundation Years by illuminating the diversity of the provision, and illustrating that students and practitioners evaluate value differently from policy makers who prioritise financial value over other kinds of non-financial value.

This study reinforces the view that Foundation Year programmes cannot be treated as a monolithic entity in higher education provision. They provide students, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds, with mental health difficulties, and with poor academic qualifications, a chance to succeed in a society and a labour market that privileges students with university degrees. Foundation Year programmes are valuable and important pathways, as the students, and the academics who train them, have affirmed.

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APPENDIX A: Interview Schedule

Interview Questions

1. How did you get into this role?
2. Could you tell me a bit about the programme and what its aims are?
3. What do you think students value most about FY programs?
4. What value do you believe Foundation Year programmes give students in the short-term and long-term?
5. What have students said are most important to them about their course?
6. The Augar Report called into question the value of Foundation Year programmes for students. How would you respond to this?
 - a. Do you think students clock the 'financial value discourse' that plays out in reports such as the Augar report and the media?
7. Where does the Widening Participation agenda fall into the strategy for the Foundation Year programme development?
8. What is the strategy for FY programme development in general?

Prompt: How do they differ from the values expressed by senior staff at the institution? How do you manage those tensions?

9. Do you think any of the teaching strategies are different to the undergraduate teaching?
 - a. If so, what are they and why do you use them?
Prompts: is there a session you've done recently/ what kinds of approaches to you normally use?

APPENDIX B: Student Questionnaire

Perceptions of Value in Foundation Year Programmes

Do you agree to participate with the understanding that the data (including any personal data) you submit will be processed accordingly?

Please read the attached Participant Information Sheet for more information.

- I Agree.
- I do not agree.

1. Please select the option that best suits you.

- I am in my first year of my Foundation year programme
- I am in my second, third, or fourth year of my Foundation year programme
- I have completed my Foundation year programme (all four years)

2. How old are you?

- Under 18
- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55 and over

3. What is your ethnic group?

- Asian/Asian British
- Arab or other Gulf States
- Black/African/Black Caribbean/Black British
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
- White
- Any other ethnic group

4. Are you the first person in your immediate family to go to university?

- Yes
- No

5. Why did you choose a Foundation Year programme?

- I wanted to attend this particular university
- I wanted to be in a university environment
- I did not do as well as I expected on my A-levels so I had to do a foundation year programme.
- The Foundation year programme will help me get a better job
- I am not sure why I picked a Foundation year programme
- Other Reason (please specify)

6. Did the Foundation Year help you....

	Yes	No	I don't know/Not sure
Feel more confident?			
Learn more about your subject area?			
Learn study skills (referencing, using the library, learning to write a lab report, etc.)?			
Get you more familiar with the university environment?			
Make new friends?			
Think about your future career?			

7. How confident did you feel when you started the Foundation Year programme?

(1-5)

8. How confident are you now?

(1-5)

9. Being on the Foundation Year programme made me a better student academically.

- Agree
- Disagree
- I don't know

10. My lecturers and personal tutors support me in my learning.

- Agree
- Disagree
- I don't know

11. What kinds of study skills have you learned on the Foundation Year programme?

[Free text]

12. How much do you value personal support like personal tutoring and one to one catch ups? [student moves meter from 0-10; 0 is not at all, 10 is a lot]



13. Do you feel that being on the Foundation Year helped you learn how to be a better university student?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

14. How much do you value learning study skills like writing a lab report, writing an essay, learning to do referencing, etc? [student moves meter from 0-10; 0 is not at all, 10 is a lot]



15. Are you able to explore a variety of subjects on your Foundation Year course?

- Yes
- No

16. I feel comfortable in a university environment.

- Agree
- Disagree

17. How much do you value being able to explore different subjects? [student moves meter from 0-10; 0 is not at all, 10 is a lot]



18. What is the single best thing you've gotten out of the Foundation Year programme?

[Free text]

19. What is something you would change to your Foundation Year programme?

[Free text]

20. "Without the Foundation Year, I would not have gone to university."

- True
- False

21. If you could go back and do it again, would you choose a Foundation Year programme?

- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

22. How reasonable or unreasonable is the cost of tuition of the Foundation Year degree?

- Reasonable for what I'm getting
- Not reasonable for what I'm getting
- It doesn't matter. It costs what it costs

23. Do you think we should keep Foundation Year programmes running in the future?

- Yes. Please say why
- No. Why not?
- [Free text]

24. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your experience on the foundation year?

- Very Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Satisfied
- Very Satisfied

25. How likely are you to recommend a Foundation Year programme to friends and family?

[0-10 scale? 0 is not at all, 10 is a lot]

APPENDIX C: Central University Research Ethics Committee Form

CENTRAL UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (CUREC)

CUREC 1A Checklist for the Social Sciences and Humanities



The University of Oxford places a high value on the knowledge, expertise, and integrity of its members and their ability to conduct research to high standards of scholarship and ethics. The research ethics clearance procedures have been established to ensure the University is meeting its obligations as a responsible institution. They start from the presumption that all members of the University take their responsibilities and obligations seriously and will ensure that their research involving human participants is conducted according to the established principles and good practice in their fields and in accordance, where appropriate, with legal requirements. Since the requirements of research ethics review will vary from field to field and from project to project, the University accepts that different guidelines and procedures will be appropriate.

Please refer to [Where and how to apply for ethical review](#) and the [CUREC flowchart](#) first to see if you need ethics approval.

Please complete this form using a word processor and email it, together with your [supporting documents](#), to your [Departmental Research Ethics Committee \(DREC\)](#) (if applicable). If you don't have a DREC please email this form to ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk using your official ox.ac.uk email address. Only type-written, emailed applications will be accepted.

SECTION A: Filter for CUREC 2 application		
This section determines whether your study raises more complex issues requiring the completion of a full application for ethical review, known as the CUREC 2 application. (Please mark 'X' in the Yes/ No column.)		
1. Are research participants classed as people whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question ? (This may include under 18s (although see competent youths), prisoners, or adults at risk.) Your attention is drawn to the University's Safeguarding Code of Practice and its implications for researchers involving children or adults at risk. This includes the need for the work to be risk assessed and for researchers to undertake related training. (Note: If any of your participants are aged 16 or under, answer 'Yes' here and also answer question 5 below.)	Yes ☐	No ☒
2. By taking part in the research, will participants be at risk of criminal prosecution (e.g. by providing information on drug abuse or child abuse)?	Yes ☐	No ☒

3.	Does the research involve the deception of participants?	Yes ☐	No ☒
4.	Does your research raise issues relevant to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act (the Prevent duty), which seeks to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism? Please see advice on this on our Best Practice Guidance web page .	Yes ☐	No ☒
If you answered 'No' to all the questions above, go to Section B. If you answered 'Yes' to any question above, continue to question 5 below.			
5.	Is your project covered by a CUREC Approved Procedure (formerly known as "CUREC Protocols")?	Yes ☐	No ☐
If yes, give the specific Approved Procedure number(s):			
If you answered 'Yes' to ANY of questions 1-4, and answered 'No' to question 5, stop completing this checklist and do not submit it for ethical review. Instead, complete the CUREC 2 application form from the CUREC website, then submit that for ethical review. If you answered 'Yes' to ANY of questions 1-3, and answered 'Yes' to question 5, go on to Section B.			

SECTION B: Contact details and project description	
Contact details:	
1. Principal Investigator or supervisor (if student research) (give title and full name)	Steven Puttick
2. Name of student (if student research)	Maryam Toorawa
3. Degree programme (if student research), e.g. BA, BSc, MSc, MPhil, DPhil	MSc Education (Higher Education)
4. Department or Institute name	Department of Education
5. Address for correspondence (if different from above)	Same as above

6. University (not private) e-mail address and telephone number	Maryam.toorawa@education.ox.ac.uk +44 (0)7464 755102
7. Name and status of others taking part in the project (e.g. third year undergraduate; postdoctoral research assistant)	N/A

Project description:	
8. Title of research project	Perceptions of 'Value' in Foundation Year Programmes
9. List of location(s) where project will be conducted	Online, with a small number of UK universities
10. If your research involves overseas fieldwork or travel and your department requires a travel risk assessment, will you have completed and returned a risk assessment form beforehand? (This must be approved by your department before you travel. If you are travelling overseas, you are strongly advised to take out University travel insurance .) Please also address any physical or psychological risks for Oxford researchers and local fieldworkers in question 16 below and discuss with your Safety Officer.	Yes ☐ No ☐ Not required in this instance ☐
11. Anticipated duration of overall research project	5 months
12. Anticipated start and end dates of the part of the research project involving human participants and/or personal data	From: (22/03/21) To: (06/08/21) Note: You will need ethics approval before you start your research. CUREC 1As may take up to 30 days to process. Retrospective ethics approval cannot be granted.
In the case of international or collaborative research, will you submit or have you submitted this project for ethical review or consideration elsewhere (e.g. collaborator's/	Yes ☐ No ☐ If 'Yes', please attach ethics or other approvals and give more details below. If 'No', please explain your reasons below.

local ethics committee, or other local approval)?	Please also refer to the Best Practice Guidance on Ethical Review of social-sciences based research conducted outside the UK (BPG 16), which includes an Ethics Issues Checklist for International Research (Appendix A)
Please supply further details in response to question 12b here. N/A	
13. External organisation funding the research (if applicable)	N/A
14. Brief description of research (about 150 words) in lay language. a) When describing the research, include your methodology, how you are applying professional guidelines, and the use to which results/ data will be put. Please also declare any conflicts of interest here.	
This mixed-methods research evaluates how students perceive the value of Foundation Year programmes for their own development. There is a substantial gap in the literature that reflects on the success of Foundation Year programmes in mass higher education institutions and even less on students' perceptions of the programmes' as a project for student success. I will be asking students on Foundation Year programmes if and how they perceive the programmes as valuable. Questions will seek to understand how they define 'value' and what kinds of curricular and pedagogical approaches support their definition of value. The research methodology will combine questionnaires and focus groups with students and academic practitioners in order to answer the above question and develop a comprehensive understanding of the context of Foundation Year programmes at different UK institutions. No conflicts of interest.	
b) Description of participants and how you will obtain informed consent to take part in the research.	
i. Description of participants and your criteria for inclusion/ exclusion.	
Participants will be Foundation Year students on programmes at universities in the United Kingdom, who will be 18 years old or older. In order to qualify for the research, they must be current students on a Foundation Year programme or be undergraduate students who were previously on Foundation Year programmes. Students under 18 will not be considered. Students can be either Home/EU or International.	

Participants will likely also include academics who teach or run Foundation Year programmes who I will interview in semi-structured formats, conducted virtually. To be included in the research, these academics must be closely associated with the Foundation Year programme in question.	
ii. Your method(s) of recruitment.	
For recruitment, I will reach out to Foundation Year programme gatekeepers via email (likely academics who teach on such programmes) requesting access to Foundation year students for research. I will explain the research will include questionnaires and likely follow-up interviews. Students will volunteer for questionnaires and focus groups. Recruiting for focus groups will be from the list of participants who completed the initial questionnaire. I will use snowballing as a method to recruit students for focus groups.	
iii. Your processes for obtaining informed consent from participants.	
For focus groups: participants will sign a written consent form before the interview and consent will also be asked for orally at the beginning of the interview. The focus groups will be recorded and the data will be stored on secure servers on Oxford University's OneDrive for Business platform. For questionnaires: before accessing the questionnaire, participants will read and agree to a Consent statement that reminds them that the information given in the questionnaire will be anonymised in the write-up and any sensitive information will remain stored on secure servers on Oxford University's OneDrive for Business platform. In addition, it will clearly state that their participation is completely optional.	
Please attach separate supporting documents (in Word), if appropriate, for your research (English language versions only). Tick those you are submitting below. If appropriate supporting documents are not submitted, you will be asked to provide these separately, which may delay the ethical review process.	
Recruitment and advertisement material (e.g. a poster, social media recruitment text, or brief invitation letter/ email).	☒
Information for participants to read (or hear) before they agree to take part (e.g. written information or, if applicable, an outline oral information script).	☒
A document to record informed consent. Templates for written consent forms and/ or oral information scripts (in case of an oral consent process) are available from the CUREC website.	☒
Questions to be asked of participants (e.g. interview questions, or a preliminary scope of questions, or a sample questionnaire).	☒
(If applicable) debriefing document after participants have taken part.	☐

Please add any further details. If you feel the above approaches are not appropriate for your study, provide details on how you will obtain consent from participants Please answer question 15 if you cannot obtain informed consent.
N/A
15. If you cannot obtain informed consent from participants according to CUREC guidelines and good practice in your discipline, please give a brief explanation and justification of this decision below.
N/A
16. What are the ethical issues connected with your research and what steps have you taken to address them? Please do not answer 'none'. We need to see that you have identified potential ethical issues with respect to your research and have taken steps to address them. If applicable, please address:
a) Participant burdens and/or risks
As noted in the Participant Information Sheet, the risks to the participant are low. We will not be asking questions that should elicit fear or anxiety responses and all questions are optional. The burden to the participant will be the time needed to complete the questionnaire and participate in the focus groups (likely 15-30 minutes for each). Academic practitioners who choose to be interviewed will be also be giving their time (likely 15-30 minutes) and be reminded that their responses will be anonymised and confidential.
b) Your own physical and psychological safety as a researcher or of fieldworkers you may employ (see the University's and Social Science Division's Safety in Fieldwork guidance)
The research is low risk for the physical safety of the researchers. Due to risks from COVID-19, all the research will be undertaken virtually. The questionnaires will be administered online and the focus groups and interviews will be performed via Microsoft Teams. The content of the research is not taxing psychologically for the researchers or the participants.
c) Data protection/ confidentiality (also see Section 18).
All data from questionnaires will be stored in a password-protected files on Oxford OneDrive for Business. All identifiable information will be deleted after the research coding process. As required by Oxford Data Protection regulations, research data and consent records will be stored for three years after the thesis is submitted for marking.

All recorded interviews and focus group responses will be recorded on password-protected devices and the files will be stored on Oxford OneDrive for Business. All identifiable information will be deleted after the research coding process. As required by Oxford Data Protection regulations, research data and consent records will be stored for three years after the thesis is submitted for marking.		
Any other ethical issues. For more guidance on ethical issues, please see http://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources		
N/A		
17. Will your research involve discussing sensitive issues? This could be information relating to race or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, physical/ mental health, trade union membership, sexual life or criminal activities. If you answered 'Yes', make sure you include some supporting information (as directed in section 14b above, showing the range of questions covering these issues.	Yes ☐	No ☒
N/A		

Management and handling of personal and other research data	
All information provided by participants is considered research data for the purpose of this form. Any research data from which participants can be identified is known as personal data; any personal data which is sensitive is considered special category data. Management of personal data, either directly or via a third party, must comply with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, as set out in the University's Guidance on Data Protection and Research. In answering the questions below, please also consider the points raised in the Data Protection Checklist and whether, for higher-risk data processing, a separate Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) may also be required for the research. Advice on research data management and security is available from Research Data Oxford and your local IT department. Advice on data protection is available from information.compliance@admin.ox.ac.uk. a) Please mark 'X' against the data you will collect for your research	
Consent records (written consent forms, audio-recorded consent, assent forms (for research involving minors) including participant name)	☐
Online consent (may be anonymous)	☒
Opt-out forms	☐

Contact details for research purposes only (destroyed when no longer needed for this research)	☒
Contact details kept for future studies	☐
Audio recordings (preferably using PIN-protected audio recorder and stored on device's hard drive)	☒
Video recordings	☒
Transcript of audio/ video recordings	☒
Photographs	☐
Task results (e.g. paper/ online tasks, diary completion)	☐
Questionnaire answers	☒
Field notes	☐
Other (please specify below)	☐
b) For each of the types of data selected above, state how this will be physically transferred from where it is collected to a local secure storage site (and backed up as necessary). This includes paper records and data captured electronically. Online consent records: Consent records will be emailed to me and the uploaded to Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business, then deleted from emails. They will remain secured on Nexus 365 for 3 years as per regulations. Contact details: contact details obtained via email or during research gathering will be kept on a secure password-protected file on Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business and deleted after use. Audio recordings: Audio recordings of focus groups and interviews will be made on a password-protected device and the files will be immediately uploaded to Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business. After coding, they will be deleted. Video recordings: Video recordings of focus groups and interviews will be made on a password-protected device and the files will be immediately uploaded to Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business. After coding, they will be deleted. Transcript of audio/video recordings: transcripts will be kept on password-protected files in Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business. They will be added straight into these files from the recordings in order to minimise the movement of data. The research data will remain secured on Nexus 365 for 3 years as per regulations.	

Questionnaire answers: Questionnaires will be administered through Google Forms or Qualtrics and the data will be uploaded straight to Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business. Coding will take place on NVivo and all raw data will be deleted after coding. The research data will remain secured on Nexus 365 for 3 years as per regulations.
c) How and where will each type of data be stored during the research (until the end of all participant involvement)? Describe the arrangements for ensuring confidentiality, i.e. location of storage (e.g. Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business, SharePoint), security arrangements and de-identification of such data. Do not store unencrypted data in freely available cloud services or unprotected USB drives.
Online consent records, Contact details, Audio recordings, Video recordings, Transcript of audio/video recordings and Questionnaire answers will all be stored on Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business for the duration of the research. I will access OneDrive via my computer which is password protected at all times.
d) Will you use a unique participant number on research data instead of a participant name? If yes, state whether or not you will retain a list of participant names against numbers (i.e. pseudonymisation via a linkage list). Where will the list be stored, and when will it be destroyed?
Each participant in the focus groups will be ID'd via a participant number. The participant names and their sensitive data will be stored on a password-protected sheet on Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business. It will be destroyed after all coding and analysis is complete.
e) Who will have access to the research data?
Research data will only be available to Maryam Toorawa and Steven Puttick.
f) If research data is to be shared with another organisation, how will it be transferred/disclosed securely?
N/A
When and how will identifiable data (including audio/ video recordings & photos) be destroyed or deleted? Note: Records of consent should be retained for a minimum of three years after publication or public release. Some funders may require longer periods. If you wish to retain contact details in order to re-approach participants about future studies, you must detail this in information provided to them and obtain specific consent for this.

All identifiable data, including audio and video recordings, will be destroyed after coding and data analysis.		
g) Please confirm that you will store other research data safely for at least 3 years after final publication or public release and adhere to any additional research funder policies . For more information about the University policies, please see the University's web pages on research data management .	Yes ☒	No ☐
If 'Yes', please give details of who will store the data and on storage format, location and security. Note that open science is encouraged. If 'No', please provide further details below.		
Consent records will be uploaded to Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business. They will remain secured on Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business for 3 years as per regulations. Research data will also be stored for the 3-year minimum period on Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business.		
h) Does your research involve the use of secondary (i.e. previously collected) data? Common sources of secondary data include censuses, information collected by government departments, organisational records and data that was originally collected for other research purposes. (If "No", please go to question 19.)	Yes ☐	No ☒
i) Do you have data access agreements for the use of this secondary data? (If so, please attach these.)	Yes ☐	No ☐
j) Is your use of this secondary data compatible with what the data subjects/ participants agreed that their data should be used for?	Yes ☐	No ☐
k) Could this data be linked back to an individual or individuals? If yes, address how securely any personally identifiable data will be transferred to you, and where and for how long it will be stored during or after the research. Who will have access to it?	Yes ☐	No ☐

19. Publication and dissemination of research data and outputs. How will you disseminate and feedback project outcomes at the end of the research?
Thesis may be available on ORA, subject to Departmental regulations.

SECTION C: Methods and procedures to be used	
1. Please indicate the methods to be used:	Mark 'X'

a) Analysis of existing records	☐
b) Snowball sampling (recruiting through contacts of existing participants)	☒
c) Use of casual or local workers e.g. interpreters	☐
d) Participant observation	☐
e) Covert observation	☐
f) Observation of specific organisational practices	☐
g) Participant completes questionnaire in hard copy	☐
h) Participant completes online questionnaire or other online task	☒
i) Using social media	☐
j) Participant performs paper and pencil task	☐
k) Participant performs verbal or aural task (e.g. for linguistic study)	☐
l) Focus group	☒
m) Interview	☒
n) Audio recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	☒
o) Video recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	☒
p) Photography of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	☐
q) Others (please specify below)	☐
Please ensure you have addressed any potential ethical issues related to these methods in question B14 and in your Participant Information Sheet.	

SECTION D: Professional guidelines and training		
In this section, please mark 'X' against at least one of the following professional guidelines you aim to adhere to. You should use the principles listed in your chosen guideline(s) in conducting your own research. This is not an exhaustive list.		
Research specialism/ methodology	Association and guidance document	Please mark 'X'
Anthropology	Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth	☐
Computer Sciences	ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct	☐
Criminology	British Society of Criminology	☐
Education	British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research	☒
Geography	Association of American Geographers Statement on Professional Ethics	☐
History	Oral History Society of the UK Ethical Guidelines	☐
Internet-based Research	British Psychological Society: Conducting Research on the Internet Association of Internet Researchers Ethics Guide ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) Also see CUREC's Best Practice Guidance on internet-based research	☐
Law (Socio-Legal)	Socio-Legal Studies Association: Statement of Principles of Ethical Research	☐
Management	Academy of Management's Professional Code of Ethics	☐
Political Science	American Political Science Association (APSA) Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science	☐
Politics	Political Studies Association. Guidelines for Good Professional Conduct	☐
Psychology	British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct	☐
Social Research	Social Research Association: Ethical Guidelines	☒
Sociology	The British Sociological Association: Statement of Ethical Practice	☐
Visual Research	ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper: Visual Ethics: Ethical Issues in Visual Research	☐
Other professional guidelines. Please specify the other guidelines used here:		☐

N/A
Please indicate what training in research ethics (or research methodology) the researchers involved with this study have received, e.g. the title of the course and date completed (online training available at http://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/support/training/ethics), or discussions between researchers and supervisors, if applicable.
Both <i>Foundations of Educational Research I</i> and <i>Foundations of Educational Research II</i> provided me with a comprehensive groundwork in research methods that have helped me refine my own research practice to be ethically centred. In addition, I am working closely with Dr. Steve Puttick to ensure the research practice is ethically centred, participatory and fruitful for the participants.

The SSH IDREC Secretariat accepts either option below. If you have a DREC, check which option it prefers. Option 1: Email confirmation from a University of Oxford email address can be accepted. Separate emails should come from each of the relevant signatories as outlined below, indicating acceptance of the relevant responsibilities. Pasted images of signatures cannot be accepted. Option 2: Handwritten signatures. Please scan them and the rest of the checklist pages to create a single PDF document and email to us. Please ensure this checklist is signed by: <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> For staff research: 1. Principal Investigator 2. Head of Department (or nominee) </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> For student research: 1. Principal Investigator (project supervisor) 2. Head of Department (or nominee) 3. Student researcher </td> </tr> </table>	For staff research: 1. Principal Investigator 2. Head of Department (or nominee)	For student research: 1. Principal Investigator (project supervisor) 2. Head of Department (or nominee) 3. Student researcher
For staff research: 1. Principal Investigator 2. Head of Department (or nominee)	For student research: 1. Principal Investigator (project supervisor) 2. Head of Department (or nominee) 3. Student researcher	
Principal Investigator signature/ supervisor signature (if student research) I understand my responsibilities as Principal Investigator as outlined in the CUREC glossary and guidance on the CUREC website. I declare that the answers above accurately describe the research as presently designed, and that a new checklist will be submitted should the research design change in a way which would alter any of the above responses so as to require completion of CUREC 2 (involving full scrutiny by an IDREC). I will inform the relevant IDREC if I cease to be the principal investigator on this project and supply the name and contact details of my successor if appropriate. Signature (or email endorsement using the above declaration): _____ Print name: _____ Date: _____		
Departmental endorsement signature I have read the research project application named above. On the basis of the information available to me, I: - consider the PI and student researcher (if applicable) to be aware of their ethical responsibilities in regard to the ethical issues associated with this research; - am satisfied that: the proposed project design and scientific methodology are sound; the project has been subject to appropriate peer review; and is likely to contribute to existing knowledge and/or to the education and training of the researcher(s) and that it is in the public interest.		

Signed by Head of Department or nominee (example nominees for student research include the Director of Graduate Studies/ Director of Undergraduate Studies):

Signature (or [email endorsement](#) using the above declaration):

Print name: _____

Date: _____

Student signature (if student research)

I understand the questions and answers that have been entered above describing the research, and I will ensure that my practice in this research complies with these answers, subject to any modifications made by the principal investigator properly authorised by the CUREC system.

Signature by student (or [email endorsement](#) using the above declaration): Maryam Toorawa

Print name: Maryam Toorawa

Date: 16 February 2021

APPENDIX D: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

CUREC Approval Reference: ED-CIA-21-132

Purpose of this Study

This study explores what students on Foundation Years feel the programme gives them. Quite simply, we are trying to understand why you chose a Foundation Year programme and what you are getting out of it. We are calling this 'value'. This study will be used to understand how to better develop Foundation Year programmes to give students the things they really want to get out of it, be that a good academic foundation, an introduction to higher education, a social group, etc.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can ask the researcher any questions you may have about the study and still decide not to participate if you do not wish to. If you do choose to participate but then change your mind, you can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. We have asked you to participate because we think you have valuable feedback and opinions that will support Foundation Year programmes and Foundation Year students in the future so we do hope you choose to contribute to the research.

How will my data be used?

The data we will collect that could identify you will be contact details, age, gender, postcode, audio/video recording. Your IP address will not be stored. We will take all reasonable measures to ensure that data remain confidential. The responses you provide will be stored in a password-protected electronic file and may be used in academic publications. Identifiable information will be deleted as soon as it is no longer required for the research. Research data (including consent records) will be stored for three years after publication or public release.

Who will have access to my data?

The University of Oxford is the data controller with respect to your personal data, and as such will determine how your personal data is used in the study. The University will process your personal data for the purpose of the research outlined above. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest. Further information about your rights with respect to your personal data is available from <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/individual-rights>. This questionnaire will be written up for an MSc degree.

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee (Reference number: ED-CIA-21-132).

Who do I contact if I have a concern or I wish to complain?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, please speak to Maryam Toorawa (Maryam.toorawa@education.ox.ac.uk) or their supervisor Steven Puttick (steven.puttick@education.ox.ac.uk) and we will do our best to answer your query. We will acknowledge your concern within 10 working days and give you an indication of how it will be dealt with. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford who will seek to resolve the matter as soon as possible: Chair, Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee; Email: ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; Address: Research Services, University of Oxford, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD.

Please note that you may only participate in this study if you are 18 years of age or over.

☐ I certify that I am 18 years of age or over

If you have read the information above and agree to participate with the understanding that the data (including any personal data) you submit will be processed accordingly, please check the relevant box below to get started.

☐ Yes, I agree to take part

Name _____

Date _____