Foundation Years and Why They Matter

This page intentionally left blank

Foundation Years and Why They Matter

EDITED BY

STEPHEN LEECH

Durham University, UK

AND

SARAH HALE

University of Sheffield, UK

United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL.

First edition 2025

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83797-213-5 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-83797-212-8 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-83797-214-2 (Epub)

Contents

List of Figures and Tables

Figures

Tables

This page intentionally left blank

About the Editors

Stephen Leech is Head of Transitional Education at Durham University. He is an anthropologist and educator and has been teaching in higher education (HE) since 2002. He entered HE as an adult learner via the Durham University Foundation Programme he now leads.

Since 2005, he has worked as a specialist foundation year practitioner, widening participation and supporting fair access to HE. He has developed and delivered a range of academic programmes (and is currently designing a multidisciplinary Bridging Programme) that provide pathways for students from underrepresented groups to access HE. He has also developed a graduate teaching assistant training programme to provide PhD students with experience in working with diverse student groups and to develop the next generation of university lecturers.

He provides expertise in the fields of widening participation, fair access, and social mobility and in developing strategy for the engagement of underrepresented groups within HE. He is Chair of the Foundation Year Network, the UK's national practitioner network for foundation-level provision. He is also an Executive Board member and Trustee of Advance Learning Partnership, a North-East Multi-Academy Trust providing outstanding primary and secondary education to some of the UK most disadvantaged children.

Sarah Hale is a Senior University Teacher at the University of Sheffield, and since 2014 has been Programme Director for the university's integrated foundation year provision for mature students. Prior to this, she specialised in teaching mature part-time students, at Sheffield and, from 2006 to 2011, at Birkbeck, University of London. She began her own first degree, in Politics, as a 29-year-old single parent after spending 10 years working as a cleaner, a checkout operator, and a cook in a care home. She enjoyed university so much that she stayed for a decade, completing an MA and a PhD, and publishing research on the Labour Party and political discourse.

She is a Founding Editor (and currently Lead Editor) of the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network*, a peer-reviewed online journal of foundation year research and pedagogy, founded in 2018. With a voluntary sector background in political communication, lobbying and campaigning, she is Policy Officer at the Foundation Year Network, promoting high quality, life-changing foundation year provision and supporting those who work to provide it.

This page intentionally left blank

About the Contributors

Lewis A. Baker is a Senior Lecturer in Engineering and Physical Sciences at the University of Surrey. He has an academic background in Physics, Mathematical Biology, and Biophysical Chemistry and most recently completed an MA in Education. He is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and a Chartered Science Teacher.

Anna Barney is a Professor in the School of Engineering at the University of Southampton and Director of the Engineering, Physics and Mathematics Foundation Year. She was a founder member of the Foundation Year Network.

Lucinda Becker is Professor of Pedagogy and Director of the Arts and Humanities Foundation Year at the University of Reading. Having been a mature undergraduate herself, she has a keen interest in supporting foundation students at university.

Gabriella Cagliesi is a Professor of Economics at the University of Sussex Business School, specialising in applied economics and quantitative analysis. She is an appointed member of the Research and Evaluation Committee of the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education.

Mark Clark is the Course Director of the BSc Business and Management Studies degree and Convenor of the Foundation Year Business and Management modules at the University of Sussex Business School. He has worked in further and higher education for over 25 years.

Matthew J. Craven has 19 years' experience in university teaching and led the foundation years in Computing, Engineering, and Mathematics at the University of Plymouth for eight years until January 2024. He is currently Associate Head of School for Undergraduate Education and an author of two best-selling textbooks in Engineering Mathematics.

Ellie Davison is the Director of Foundation Year Studies at the University of Lincoln. With an early career as a molecular geneticist, she cultivated her pedagogic expertise as an 'outstanding' secondary school science teacher. She received the 2024 Biochemical Society Teaching Award and is a National Teaching Fellow.

Thomas Hobson is Director of Scholarship and Professional Practice in the Science Foundation Year at the University of Lincoln. Specialising in Mathematics, he supports early career HE Mathematics educators through his work with the Institute of Mathematics and Its Applications. Before joining the university, he taught in the Further Education sector.

Jayne Hopkins is the Director of Teaching and Learning and Physics Specialist in the University of Lincoln Science Foundation Year and a founding member of the Science Foundation Year. The department was awarded the Advance HE 'Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence' in 2019.

Nayyar Jaan Hussain is a Lecturer in Criminology at London South Bank University and formerly worked on the Foundation Pathway and Prison Project Initiative at the University of Westminster. She began her doctoral research in 2017 and has worked with foundation and undergraduate students since then.

Lee Elliot Major, OBE, is Britain's First Professor of Social Mobility, based at the University of Exeter, and former CEO of the Sutton Trust. His latest book *Equity in Education: Levelling the Playing Field of Learning* (2023) is published by John Catt.

Stuart Peck is a Lecturer at the Centre for Education and Teaching Innovation, where he teaches on the Foundation Year Pathways. He also teaches at Westminster Law School on the Legal Practice course. Recently, he completed his PhD on Legal (Higher) Education and Social Justice.

Alex Pryce is Foundation Year Course Director at the University of Cambridge, where she oversaw the development of the programme. She has a background in English literature and has worked in Public Relations and widening participation. She is a Fellow of Homerton College.

Miriam Schwiening spent over 20 years teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) on the Warwick International Foundation Programme and worked as the EAP Coordinator on the programme. She currently teaches on the MA TESOL at the University of Warwick and designs and delivers teacher education programmes for English language teachers.

Jenny M. Sharp has nearly 30 years' experience in teaching, including foundation year and BSc (Hons) Mathematics with Education, and working with schools. She is passionate about student welfare and is Senior Tutor for the School of Engineering, Computing, and Mathematics at the University of Plymouth. She is an LMS Holgate Session leader.

Carol Spencely is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences at the University of Surrey. Her experience in immunology research and

researcher development fuels her passion for teaching in higher education, resulting in her team winning a National Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence.

Amy Stickels is Director for Academic Development and Learning Enhancement (Associate Professor) for Warwick Foundation Studies at the University of Warwick. She was a secondary schoolteacher in the UK for 16 years before moving to teach international foundation year students in universities, which she has done since 2017.

David W. Stoten was Programme Leader for the Foundation Programme in Business and Management at Northumbria University until his retirement in July 2024. Before entering academia, he taught in the Sixth Form College sector.

Anna Tranter is an Assistant Professor at the International Foundation Programme, University of Warwick. She has been teaching and researching with international foundation students since 2016.

Robert Walsha is Associate Director (Learning Development) in the Department of Library and Learning Services at the University of Surrey. He has worked in student learning development for over 25 years and was instrumental in establishing a full programme- and subject-integrated model of learning development for Surrey's foundation programmes.

Dawn Whitton is Director of Education for Management and Marketing at Durham University and previously worked at Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University. She is a member of the Foundation Year Network and has worked in higher education since 2006.

This page intentionally left blank

Foreword

Lee Elliot Major
University of Exeter, UK

It's fair to say that foundation years have got a bad rap in recent years. At its annual conference in 2018, the University and College Union framed tuition fees for foundation years as a 'poverty tax' and accused universities of 'selling these courses to students while generating huge revenues'. Recent newspaper exclusives meanwhile have accused some foundation year courses for offering back door entry to poorly qualified international students – sullying the reputation of the entire foundation years sector.

Fuelled by fears that the proliferation of foundation years has been driven solely by maximising profits providing little educational value to students, the government has made the unprecedented decision to cap fees for these courses, substantially cutting their funding. Never has such a small but important strand of our university access efforts been subject to such misleading and damaging myths.

This book sets the record straight. Many foundation years transform lives. They enable thousands of people who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to not only access university, but to thrive and succeed there. They are one of the few approaches to widening degree access that we know works; studies have shown that most foundation year students progress to full degrees, performing as well as other students. They enable mature students to secure second chances in life; they overcome the many barriers faced by neurodivergent learners. As these chapters show, they can act as sources of diversity, centres of impact, and sites of innovation.

Foundation years can act as powerful vehicles of social justice. Over a one-year course, subject and academic skills specialists have time to equip students with the educational, cultural, and social capital to flourish in some of the world's most intimidating and prestigious academic institutions. At the same time, they disrupt the damaging deficit narratives that frame some students as inferior and in need of mending and fitting in.

What is also true is that foundation years have witnessed an unparalleled boom across the academic sector. Number of entrants to them rose by over 700% in a decade, from 8,470 in 2011, to 69,325 in 2021. This rapid expansion occurred with no national standardisation of the foundation year sector, either in content or academic levels. What was certainly required was greater regulation of higher education's 'wild west' to ensure that it continued to transform lives rather than budgets. Instead, the knee-jerk policy response has been to tar all foundation

courses with the same brush. What adds to this tragedy, is that it comes at a time when social mobility is in decline and prospects are worsening for applicants from under-resourced backgrounds.

I've had the privilege of meeting foundation year students. In many ways, they are typical of other students flourishing in our universities. But what makes them extra special is that they had overcome incredibly difficult circumstances to secure their cherished degree places – and this has only been made possible by the year of extra study they had completed.

My hope is that the high-quality, genuinely transformative foundation years highlighted in this book will also find ways to overcome their own difficulties, following what can only be seen as an act of senseless vandalism.

Introduction

Stephen Leech

Durham University, UK

Introduction

Every year, thousands of UK students embark on a university foundation year, taught and supported by hundreds of staff in dozens of UK institutions. They are increasingly popular among students seeking access to higher education (HE) (discussed below) and lauded as instrumental in improving life chances (Willetts, 2010). Yet outside the foundation year sector itself, little is known about what foundation years are and how they work. Discussions and political debates frequently fail to represent the diversity and value of foundation years, treating the entire foundation year sector as a homogeneous provision. Despite producing numerous graduates who would otherwise never have had the chance of a university education, and who are now entering graduate professions and making positive contributions to the economy and wider society, foundation years are little known and less understood, not respected and sometimes reviled (see Griffiths et al., 2018). In 2024, at the time of writing, foundation years are the object of hostile policy in the form of fee cuts, which appears to foundation year practitioners to lack a credible evidence base: very little evidence has ever been collected about foundation year provision, let alone evaluated (Kernohan, 2023).

The purpose of this book is to draw together expertise and experience from across the foundation year sector and provide case studies which use both quantitative and qualitative research to illustrate some of the complexities of foundation years and to increase awareness of the breadth and depth of foundation year provision. Indeed, this book highlights that it is exactly the history and capacity of foundation years to adapt and evolve to the contexts of student demography, academic discipline, and higher education institutions (HEIs) that is the source of both their strength and vulnerability. While foundation year provision has proved increasingly popular with students, its success has made it vulnerable, both to those wishing to make, and to save, money within the HE marketplace. The highly contextualised provision of foundation years defies simplistic measures of value, and attempts to portray foundation years as a homogeneous entity only serve to misrepresent this highly diverse and dynamic provision.

Foundation Years and Why They Matter, 1–17

doi:10.1108/978-1-83797-212-820241001

With a focus on context, this introduction begins by taking a long view of changes in education policy that influenced the landscape of access to HE in England across the 20th century. This is important because the origin of foundation years is not straightforward and in many cases has evolved from historical widening access provision within individual HEIs, adapting and rebranding to respond to the changing context of HE policy. The focus then shifts to explore the development and growth of foundation years since 2011, when 'foundation year' provision begins to be recognised on a sector-wide level. This situates foundation years' evolving position as one of a number of routes into HE, for a range of different kinds of (prospective) student. This chapter ends with a high-level, cross-sector overview of the nature and diversity of foundation year provision and the current political situation and challenges being faced by the foundation year sector, primarily with regard to home fee students in England, but with implications for the rest of the United Kingdom and, perhaps, for the rest of the HE sector. We begin, however, with a brief introduction to foundation years and their unique evolution.

Foundation Years: A Very Brief Introduction

Foundation years are one-year academic courses (sometimes available part-time over two years) that are designed to prepare students for successful study in higher education. They are integrated, in that they form the first year of study of a full undergraduate degree course, often referred to as Year 0, and successful completion of this year guarantees progression to the next year of study without the need for a further application, just like progressing between years in the rest of the degree course. Each foundation year is designed to provide preparation for a specific group of students, to study a specific undergraduate degree course (or a small group of allied courses), within the academic and social context of a specific higher education provider (HEP). This means that although all foundation years share some common aims and objectives, each foundation year is likely to look and do things differently as they respond to the differing needs of the students, subject, and institution they serve. Some provide pathways to specific subjects, others to a range of subjects within one or more discipline clusters. Some cater for home fee students only, some for overseas (international) students, and some for both. (This book concentrates on home fee foundation years but includes an example of an international foundation year to highlight the similarities that can exist between provisions.) There is no national standardisation of foundation years, either in content or academic level, which are both determined by the institutional requirements of the university they serve. Some align themselves with Level 3 (A Level), others with Level 4 (undergraduate Year 1), whereas others position themselves somewhere between, referring to themselves as Level 0 or Level 4a. Some concentrate solely on providing places for mature learners (over 21 at point of entry), others focus on supporting recent A Level students from one or more particular social demographics. The result is a richly diverse and highly contextualised provision.

The Origins of Foundation Years

The history of foundation years is inextricably linked to complex societal and political shifts that have shaped the UK education sector. Wider access to primary and secondary education began as a result of philanthropic endeavours during the industrial revolution. One function of these charity schools was that they helped to equip the workforce with the skills to support rapid industrialisation (Kumbhat, 2022). It was after the devastation of the British workforce during World War I and the great depression that followed that primary and secondary education became the responsibility of the government.

The Adult Education Committee Report produced by the Ministry of Reconstruction (1919) linked education to citizenship. This led to the British Institute of Adult Education (1921), promoting mass education as a means of creating shared values and national identity (Kumbhat, 2022). Post-World War II reconstruction of Britain brought about the Education Act 1944, which placed a new focus on young and adult vocational training to meet industrial labour demands by creating compulsory secondary education requirements. This was intended as a tripartite system, with publicly funded ('state') 'Secondary Modern', 'Grammar', and 'Technical' schools, with the last never being realised. In the resulting bipartite system, Grammar schools were selective, requiring an entry test called the Eleven Plus, and focussed on academic studies with an expectation of going on to professional employment or university. Pupils who did not pass the Eleven Plus went to Secondary Modern schools where it was assumed most children would go into a trade or unskilled labour (Long et al., 2023). Importantly, this act introduced free secondary schooling.

The notion of 'accessibility' to higher education had been discussed as early as 1868 in Scotland, when the Education Commission justified an increase in university participation on the grounds of economic prosperity (McPherson, 1973). However, participation in HE did not become commonplace outside the wealthy classes until the late 1900s. In 1920, only 4,357 first degrees were awarded in the United Kingdom (from all domiciles). This figure grew to 17,337 by 1950 and 22,426 by 1960 (Bolton, 2012) bolstered by increased participation in the grammar school system. It was also the direct result of the Education Act 1962, which created free, or nearly free, higher education through grants for living costs and partially means-tested tuition fees for full-time UK undergraduate students.

The Robbins Report, published in 1963, centralised the role of universities in delivering HE courses to 'all who were qualified for them by ability and attainment' and the importance of education for the socio-economic wellbeing of individuals and the nation. In his 1965 Labour Party conference speech, the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson (2015), clearly stated this aim:

> for children, deprived of a fair chance in life, to have that chance. And opportunity to us [the Labour Party] means for every boy and girl, the right to the educational development which will enable him or her to develop their innate talents and qualities to the full.

Such opportunities became more commonplace in UK universities throughout the 1960s and 1970s, with many 'red-brick' universities, in particular, providing dedicated adult education and using extra-mural departments to deliver part-time and evening study (Kogan, 2000), and it was under Wilson's Labour government that the Open University was formed in 1969. It was also during this period that polytechnic provision expanded. These institutions focussed on developing a more highly skilled population, reflecting a more ambitious form of nation-building exercise, and perhaps a more generous recognition of individual potential and an egalitarian approach to HE.

The result was a rapid increase in the number of first degrees awarded in the United Kingdom (from all domiciles) from its 1960 total of 22,426, to 51,189 in 1970, and then to 68,150 by 1980 (Bolton, 2012, Table 8). This corresponds to an overall rise in the proportion of people who were studying in English HE from 7% in 1962 to about 13% in 1980 (Anderson, 2016). The cost of HE expansion was predominantly paid for through general taxation and understood as an investment for the country:

> Free higher education was seen as a long-term investment in human and intellectual capital, and those who benefited from it would expect to pay through progressive taxation for its extension to future generations. (Anderson, 2016, para. 14)

Access to HE programmes emerged in the 1970s to provide entry routes into HE specifically for those without traditional qualifications, n.d. It is difficult to establish an exact picture of the size and shape of Access to HE availability or uptake during this period as, like foundation years, there was no centralised definition or records of early provision. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) only began collecting data about Access to HE in 1998 (Farmer, 2017). This was a full decade after the white paper, *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge*, identified Access to HE as 'the third recognised route to higher education', and a year before a national framework for Access to HE provision was introduced in 1989. For a while, Access to HE courses existed both in Further Education (FE) and HE (Osborne et al., 1997) with FE generally focussing on vocational subjects and courses (as it still does) and consequently being more likely to provide routes to vocationally focussed subjects.

In-house university access programmes, often in higher tariff universities, focussed on refining and developing their own bespoke access programmes in preference to FE-delivered Access to HE programmes. Hinton-Smith (2012) suggests that 'high-tariff' universities were often reluctant to offer places to Access to HE students, preferring to fill their places with those students who were more likely to complete their degree. Osborne et al. (1997) noted that

> the more influence and control the University has over Access courses, the better students will perform subsequently, but that FE entrants performed less well than HE based Access students, even where the University had some control over the courses through a linked college scheme. (p. 171)

Providing an in-house Access programme afforded universities greater control over student numbers and standards of provision and often repurposed resources from existing extra-mural and adult learning provision in their delivery (Marshall & Leech, 2011).

In the early 1990s, the term 'foundation year' began being used for some university-based access courses. In 1992, both Durham University and Southampton University began enrolling 'Foundation' students (Durham University, n.d.; Nash & Sherwood, 2002). Both new foundation years were for Science, Technology, and Engineering (STE) subjects and were able to access 'fees only' funding through the newly established Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Such funding had been introduced to allay concerns about the reduced numbers taking maths and physics at A Level. The name 'foundation year', however, most likely originated from Art Foundation courses, the first of which was an introductory course for art, design, and architecture students established by Victor Pasmore in the late 1950s in the Fine Art Department of Durham University's Kings College, Newcastle upon Tyne (now Newcastle University) (Yeomans, 1987).

As the number of first degrees awarded in the United Kingdom (from all domiciles) more than trebled, from 77,163 in 1990, to 243,246 in 2000 (Bolton, 2012, Table 8) and the cost to the government of HE provision increased, maintenance grants became supplemented with government-backed maintenance loans. In 1997, the Dearing Report, among a wide-ranging raft of recommendations, addressed the increasing burden to the government purse and concluded that 'graduates in employment should make a greater contribution to the costs of higher education' (Dearing, 1997). As a result, in 1998, tuition fees were imposed on first-time, full-time students. As the funding streams changed, public accountability was supplemented by nominal accountability to students, and this paved the way for the current student loan arrangements. The Dearing Report also cemented into UK HE legislation two fundamentally important elements that are required to understand the subsequent rise of foundation years in the United Kingdom: the marketisation of HE, and a direct link between government controlled funding for HE and institutional activities designed to increase widening participation (WP) in HE.

As noted, the relationship between access to HE and funding for HE was already established. However, it was its appearance in the Dearing Report, which was commissioned by the outgoing Conservative government in 1997, that established the term 'Widening Participation' and created a persistent link to university funding. The report asserted that the HE community should more accurately represent wider society and ensure that opportunities to study at university were more accessible to underrepresented groups, such as women, mature, low socio-economic, and ethnic minority students. Some universities began rebranding their adult education, extra-mural, and access provision as WP provision.

In 2002, the *SET for success – The supply of people with science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills* report (Roberts, 2002) further underscored the downturn in the number of students studying Mathematics to a level required for Science, Engineering, and Technology (SET) degrees, adding Mathematics to the set (STEM). Universities were encouraged to develop further additional study courses at or before entry 'to smooth the transition between A Level and

degree-level … preparing students for degree-level work in the physical sciences and mathematics in particular' (Roberts, 2002, p. 91). Foundation years, which were already active in this space, provided a way to achieve this.

In 2004, universities were permitted to charge fees up to a maximum of £3,000 a year for a full degree, including a foundation year, funded by an income-contingent student loan. The introduction of fees was accompanied by the establishment of the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) which required institutions to produce access agreements alongside their HEFCE strategies to ensure that universities and colleges were explicitly committed to increasing participation in HE among underrepresented groups (Clarke, 2004).

In 2010, following the Brown Report (J. Brown, 2010), the coalition government permitted universities to charge up to £9,000 a year, intended to cover the whole cost of teaching, and to replace the teaching element in the state grant. However, this was subject to universities providing a suitable access agreement (Anderson, 2016).

> The choices made by students – now conceived of as customers exercising choice in paying for a product in a market, and no longer as citizens exercising a social right – were intended to drive the development of the system, reshaping it through competition between institutions. (Anderson, 2016, para. 20)

The change in fee regime was accompanied by increased focus on OFFA's role, not just to encourage fair access but to 'monitor and review the implementation of institutions' Access Agreements' (p. 7). It was also OFFA's role to act if institutions were not meeting their commitments to ensure WP and success for students from disadvantaged backgrounds more generally (Willetts, 2011).

How to operationalise WP was, however, a responsibility devolved to individual universities as part of the protections of the autonomy of universities outlined in the Robbins (1963) Report. This autonomy has been summarised as 'the right to determine, on academic grounds, who may teach, who may be taught, what may be taught and how it should be taught' and referred to as a 'quadrilateral' of autonomy (BIS, 2011a). This meant that despite a desire to be more prescriptive, the government was constrained by the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, which made it clear that universities, not the government, control admissions. As a result, the 2004 Higher Education Act 'requires the Director of Fair Access to respect the autonomy of institutions with regard to admission of students' (Willetts from BIS, 2011b). The changes to OFFA were, therefore,

> focused on the outcomes we expect from universities rather than dictating how they are to be achieved. The new system will be flexible; respecting university autonomy and enabling institutions to decide which measures to improve access suit their particular circumstances and characteristics. (Willetts, 2011)

An increasing number of universities adopted foundation years and began delivering them in non-STEM subjects. Foundation years were a powerful tool

by which universities could demonstrate their commitment to WP, while retaining control over student numbers and standards of provision, and they attracted full undergraduate fee income. Their strategic deployment became more widespread, and over the next decade, foundation years emerged in almost every academic discipline. By 2010, when official sector level data became available, there were 8,785 English domiciled students recorded as being enrolled on a 'foundation year' course in England, being delivered by 54 foundation year providers (OfS, 2021), although this figure may actually have been higher, as discussed below. Each foundation year provided a pathway into HE that universities were free to design to their own specifications, each in response to the unique contexts of the students, academic disciplines, and educational providers they served.

The Growth of Foundation Years 2011–2018

From 2011, the government continued to consolidate a system of student funding for HE that compelled HEIs to address fair and widening access agendas in order to access student fees in an increasingly competitive 'market' structure. It is notable that at this point, foundation years were valued by the government for their WP potential. David Willetts' 2010 statement as Universities Minister that 'expanding the model of a foundation year for young people with high potential but lower qualifications' would be instrumental in improving life chances was followed by the 2011 Government White Paper *Students at the Heart of the System,* which promoted foundation year programmes for their role in improving access to HE among the least well-off young people and adults (BIS, 2011b, p. 61). Universities looked to foundation year provision as a valuable tool for responding to the strategic pressures of WP and competitive recruitment. Increasingly, HEIs sought to provide foundation years, either directly or through franchised FE provision.

In 2011, with very little official data available on foundation year provision, Durham University's Foundation Centre (established in 1992 out of their Lifelong Learning provision) commissioned Marketwise to produce a report of the data available to the public on foundation year courses, from the websites of 127 universities throughout the United Kingdom (Marketwise, 2011). The report, which was subsequently reviewed by Leech et al. (2016), found that foundation years for home and European Union (EU) fee-paying students were offered in 76 HEPs. It is worth noting that Department for Education figures (DfE, 2023a) state the number of foundation year providers in 2010 stood at 54 rather than the 76 found by Marketwise, which may speak to a lack of clarity that existed then, and still persists, in defining foundation years.

Using the DfE data, it can be seen that the number of foundation year providers dipped to 52 in 2011 and 51 in 2012, rose briskly from 56 in 2013 to 98 in 2019, reaching 105 HEIs in 2021. The increase in foundation year providers among 'higher tariff' (OfS typology) institutions was modest, rising from 12 in 2010 to 15 (+25%) in 2021, likely because high-tariff universities were early adopters of foundation years, having converted existing WP provision into the foundation year model. The increase was much larger among medium tariff institutions, where the number of foundation year providers increased from

21 to 42 (+100%), larger again among low or unknown tariff providers, where provision increased from 18 to 42 providers (+133%), and highest among specialist (creative and 'other') providers, where provision rose from 3 to 15 providers (+400%) between 2010 and 2021 (DfE, 2023a).

Foundation year providers often offer a number of foundation year courses, and in 2011, the 52 DfE recognised providers offered a total of 678 individual foundation year courses between them. This figure dipped slightly to 628 in 2012, rose to 698 in 2013 and then to 802 in 2014. Between 2014 and 2015, with the number of foundation year providers increasing from 59 to 65, there was a surge in the number of foundation year courses, rising from 802 to 1,339. In the following years, the number of courses continued to rise, reaching 1,834 in 2016, 2,125 in 2017, and increasing each year to reach 3,717 in 2021 (DfE, 2023a).

In 2010, the vast majority of foundation year courses were offered in Sciences and Mathematics (49), Engineering and Technology (52), Computing (22), Art and Design (21), or Medicine (8). Only a very small number of institutions offered a foundation year in Social Sciences or Humanities (12), Business and Management (9), Sport Sciences (6), and Law (5). An even smaller number of programmes lay outside of these areas, including Health and Social Care, Games and Animation, Motor Sports, Film and Television Production, and a bespoke 'foundation year for the Visually-Impaired' (Leech et al., 2016). Roughly speaking, this means that over 80% of foundation years in 2011, as identified in the Leech et al. (2016) study, would now be considered in the higher cost subject groups (OfS Price Groups B and C), and less than 20% in the lower cost subject group (OfS Cost Group D) (OfS, 2023). This probably reflects the focus on STE(M)-based courses promoted through the availability of funding, discussed above.

In 2021, according to DfE data, the distribution of foundation year courses was 41% Groups B and C and 59% Group D, with 72% of foundation year students studying non-science courses (DfE, 2023a), a more or less complete reversal from 2011. Exploration of the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS), a way of classifying academic subjects and modules, shows that while the number of science courses in Subjects Allied to Medicine saw a 31% increase in the number of foundation year courses available between 2015 and 2018, most science courses saw modest growth during this period, with Mathematical Sciences and Physical Sciences seeing a 4% growth and Computer Science an 8% growth. During the same period, Law saw a 33% growth, Business and Administrative Studies a 26% growth, and Social Studies a 24% growth. The 31% increase in Subjects Allied to Medicine courses translated into an increase in student numbers from 830 in 2019 to 2,460 in 2018. The 26% increase in Business and Administrative Studies courses translated into an increase in student numbers from 4,250 in 2015 to 10,740 in 2018.

In 2019, the JACS of academic subjects and modules was replaced by the Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH), which provides a standardised hierarchical aggregation (grouping) of subject codes and terms based upon Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS) codes and terms. Using CAH categories, the rise in Subjects Allied to Medicine between 2019 and 2021 was 9% and translated to a further increase in student numbers from 3,415 in 2019 to 4,460 in 2021. The increase in the number of students entering Business and Management