

# *The Journal of the Foundation Year Network: A Publication By and For the (Foundation Year) People*

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*This article-length editorial seeks to explain the purpose of the Journal of the Foundation Year Network, relating this purpose to the 'objects' of the Foundation Year Network. It then seeks to explore what has characterised the Journal since its inception in 2018, using the theme from that year's annual conference, 'Unity and Diversity in the Foundation Year Experience', to structure the discussion. It ends with a conclusion that reflects a little on how JFYN might develop in the future, with a direct address to you, the reader, to consider how you could be part of that development! The purpose of the editorial is to give a clear indication of the vision that drives the Journal in the hope that you might better understand the purposes it serves and the ways in which it does that so that you are clearer about what role YOU might play in its development over coming years.*

## **Introduction**

In preparation for writing this editorial, I read through all the articles from the six volumes of the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network (JFYN)* – yes, all sixty-five of them! I found this a hugely encouraging experience and I ended the process feeling proud of what we – together as a network – have produced over the last six years. It feels as though the *Journal* is now established as an important part of what the Foundation Year Network (FYN<sup>1</sup>) offers to its members – created by its members.

Most of our articles start life as conference presentations, but we extend beyond that and include articles written specifically for the *Journal*. However, the first volume was effectively a 'conference proceedings' from the Foundation Year Network Annual Conference (FYNAC<sup>2</sup>) that year (2018), entitled, 'Unity and Diversity in the Foundation Year Experience'. This theme of unity and diversity is reflected throughout the six volumes of the *Journal*. The articles cover a

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<sup>1</sup> FYN is technically an 'initialism' – i.e., the letters are pronounced individually, like BBC.

<sup>2</sup> By contrast to the above, FYNAC is usually treated as an 'acronym' that is pronounced as a word, 'fihnack', often with the year added: e.g., FYNAC24 (in Lincoln) or FYNAC18 in the example given here.

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wide diversity of topics and represent a diverse range of approaches from staff and students involved in foundation year provision in diverse ways, across a diversity of academic disciplines as well as a variety of support roles, and from a diverse collection of universities. But the articles are united by a number of characteristics: a clearly evidenced commitment to our students; a determination to seek the best ways to facilitate those students' learning; a concern about the wellbeing of our students; a focus on innovative and student-centred learning; and an openness to learn ourselves from what others in the FYN and beyond are doing as we – together – work to provide highly effective routes into higher education.

The first volume of the *Journal* started with an introduction in which we as editors briefly explained what we were setting out to do as we launched this new venture. I will start off this article-length introduction (or editorial) by returning to that theme at a bit more length.

### **The Purpose of the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network***

The *Journal* was set up to support the 'objects' of the Foundation Year Network (FYN). These objects are as follows:

The Company's objects are to organise an annual Foundation Year Network Conference, and to represent, promote and support:

- good practice in foundation year provision;
- the academic and scholarly activities of foundation year practitioners;
- continuing professional development opportunities for foundation year practitioners;
- foundation years as part of a diversity of provision for entry into higher education.<sup>3</sup>

We noted in the first editorial that the *Journal* most obviously contributes to the first two of these. This continues to be the case. However, *JFYN* contributes in important ways to all four bullet-pointed objects – in addition, of course, to its close ties to the annual Foundation Year Network Conference.

### **The Annual Foundation Year Network Conference**

From the start, the *Journal* has been closely tied to the Foundation Year Network Annual Conference (FYNAC). The majority of articles start their lives as presentations or other contributions to the FYNAC programme, and we expect this to continue. This adds extra impetus for foundation year practitioners and their students to contribute to the conference and may also encourage those making such contributions to ensure that their material engages thoroughly with scholarly literature, mostly scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL)<sup>4</sup> but also disciplinary and other material. This is a requirement for acceptance of journal articles. Thus, the *Journal* is a factor in encouraging rigorous contributions to the conference programme and helps to provide a record of some of what takes place at FYNAC each year. Indeed, rereading all the articles sparked in my mind memories of presentations, discussions and conversations at the Conference every year and re-ignited my interest in aspects of foundation year provision in particular, and teaching and

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<sup>3</sup> The Foundation Year Network Limited is now a 'Company Limited by Guarantee'. Prior to 2021, it was an 'unincorporated association'. This paragraph is taken from the Foundation Year Network Limited Articles of Association, section C, which were unchanged in the move to becoming a limited company.

<sup>4</sup> The 'Scholarship of Teaching and Learning' is often known by the acronym SoTL, pronounced 'sottle'.

learning more broadly, that had been subdued, if not actually snuffed out, by the busyness of everyday life at university.

### ***Good Practice in Foundation Year Provision***

A vitally important role that the FYN serves is to encourage and support good practice in the provision of foundation year programmes, especially for students who do not follow the ‘traditional route’ straight from sixth form to a degree course at university. The Network is a professional practitioner organisation that fosters best practice in the preparation of students for degree-level study. FYNAC is a key means by which this is achieved, as is the Network’s programme of online workshops. This is also an area where the *Journal* is a particularly effective instrument in the FYN toolkit: it requires authors to reflect carefully and deeply and in dialogue with appropriate scholarship as they seek to explain clearly for a cross-disciplinary readership the contribution they wish to offer; it enables readers to engage with the issues at their own pace, with helpful bibliographies to further inform their considerations, and to think about ways in which what they read in the *Journal* might inform their own practice.

### ***The Academic and Scholarly Activities of Foundation Year Practitioners***

Yes, the FYN is a practitioner organisation, but it is not *just* a practitioner organisation. Our members are involved in one way or another with preparing students to perform to the best of their ability in the academic world of the university and other higher education institutions (HEIs). It is crucial, therefore, that our practice is informed by rigorous academic thinking and scholarly activity. The *Journal* functions in some ways like our ‘shop window’: it displays some of the best work from across the foundation year sector and demonstrates that our practice is indeed underpinned by solid scholarship and careful reflection. Thus, our articles are peer-reviewed by a range of disciplinary experts. This means that the journal serves as an instrument to further the academic and scholarly activities not just of its authors and readers, but also of those from the Network involved in other ways in its production, as reviewers and editors.

While the vast majority of articles intimately relate to and are informed by practice within foundation year programmes, the articles engage with the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and contribute to knowledge and understanding in this field in ways that make the *Journal* relevant beyond the foundation year sector.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, there is much that teachers in a range of disciplines or in different support roles can learn from the scholarly and reflective articles in *JFYN* that arise from specific disciplinary teaching and learning or particular support roles. Further-more, a high proportion of foundation year practitioners either enter the university sector from a career elsewhere, often from teaching or support in other sectors, whether schools or colleges or other institutions, or provide foundation year teaching in colleges. There is much for university staff to learn from those who teach or provide student support in other contexts and foundation year practitioners in universities seem often to be more open to such learning than other university staff, setting an example for others to follow.

It is, therefore, important that the *Journal* continues to publish high quality articles that, while mostly focused on the practice of foundation year provision, are also solidly based on careful, reflective engagement with existing scholarship, and are reviewed by a pool of appropriately qualified peers.

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<sup>5</sup> The article by Feather *et al.* (2023), later in this volume, is particularly pertinent in this regard. The authors argue, ‘By utilising the approaches used on foundation year courses, universities can guard against any adverse effects and ensure students are supported on their learning journeys’ (p. XXX).

### ***Continuing Professional Development Opportunities for Foundation Year Practitioners***

The FYN seeks to foster and support continuing professional development opportunities for its members. This happens in various ways: the annual conference, the programme of online workshops, the scholarship group, the mentoring scheme, occasional events, advertising of and support for one-off workshops and training offered by members at their own institutions, advertising of job opportunities and external examiner positions, etc. The *Journal* also has an important role to play in this regard. In addition to seeking articles from experienced practitioners who have a record of scholarly publications, the *Journal* also provides an opportunity for foundation year practitioners who have not published previously, or who have not published articles related to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, to do so in a supportive environment. For many of our authors, an article in the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network* is their first foray into the world of academic publishing and this is a key aspect of the CPD opportunities that the Network offers, facilitates or supports. However, while of course we want to publish our members' articles, we also encourage foundation year practitioners to publish elsewhere so that we are showcasing the excellent work that takes place in foundation year programmes to a broader audience.

Therefore, not only is it important that the *Journal* continues to publish high quality articles that are solidly based on engagement with existing scholarship and are reviewed by a pool of appropriately qualified peers, it is also important that we provide opportunities for Network members to develop their article-writing skills and to gain experience as reviewers and editors. It has long been our aim (as journal editors) to provide workshops that offer members of the FYN training in the various aspects of journal production: from writing workshops, through to reviewing and editing workshops. Various constraints (mostly time) have prevented us from offering these to this point, but the aim remains!

### ***Foundation Years as Part of a Diversity of Provision for Entry into Higher Education***

While the work of the FYN largely focuses on foundation year programmes, we readily acknowledge that there are other routes into higher education and celebrate this diversity of provision. We firmly – even fervently – believe in the value of what we do<sup>6</sup> but seek to support and work with others who also provide ways for prospective students to access higher education, particularly those who have not followed or who, for a variety of reasons, would not follow the 'traditional route' straight from sixth form into university. This includes international students: there are many foundation year programmes either solely or partly devoted to preparing international students for study at a UK HEI. For the Network, the focus is primarily on what is best for individual students: what route most effectively enables them to perform to their best on a degree programme, given whatever constraints or limitations they might have to contend with or their past educational experience? While the vast majority of foundation years operate within

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<sup>6</sup> This despite some vociferous opposition from elsewhere. A striking example is an article in FE Week by Chowen, entitled, 'Uni foundation year numbers up 700% in 10 years: New figures reveal foundation year courses are less likely to improve incomes'. Other examples include an article in *The Sunday Times*, by Griffiths, Singh and Ward, entitled, "Join us for an extra foundation year, say universities to weaker students". By contrast, a strong defence of foundation year provision is the article by Braisby, 'The Value of Foundation Years in Higher Education'.

or are associated with universities,<sup>7</sup> we do, of course, also recognise that higher education is not restricted to the university sector and wish to encourage prospective students to find the best route for themselves into higher education and the best place for them to undertake their degree-level studies. (We also recognise that individual members will likely have loyalty to their own institutions and that many (or most?) of these institutions will want to maintain or increase their recruitment – it is, whether we like it or not, a competitive market.)

The *Journal*, too, is mostly focused on foundation year provision within a university context. However, there is a smattering of articles that discuss other pathways and we would welcome appropriate contributions submitted by practitioners in such programmes.<sup>8</sup>

### Diversity and Unity in the FYN and JFYN

Drawing on the theme of FYNAC18<sup>9</sup> and, therefore, the first issue of the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network* ('Unity and Diversity in the Foundation Year Experience'), most of the rest of this editorial will seek to give a flavour of what has characterised the *Journal* over the past few years, including this volume. It seems more appropriate, though, to consider the theme in reverse order: diversity and then unity in the foundation year experience as it is reflected in *JFYN*.

The diversity of the Network is both one of its biggest challenges and also one of its greatest strengths – or at least the ways in which the Network copes with its diversity and mostly makes it into a unifying factor is, perhaps, *actually* its greatest strength.<sup>10</sup> I suspect that this is also one reason for the friendliness of the annual conference: there is no point in the kind of competitiveness that so often (in my experience at least) characterises disciplinary conferences because we are such a hugely diverse collection of people from a wide range of diverse disciplines that for FYNAC to work at all, we need to focus on our shared interests. Therefore, even presentations or workshops or other contributions focused on a particular discipline need to be presented in ways that demonstrate applicability to a broader audience who may know little about that discipline. I suspect in addition that typically foundation year practitioners are much more focused on their students than would often be the case at disciplinary events and less focused on themselves and their own particular expertise (important as the latter undoubtedly is in academia).

The *Journal* is similarly diverse in a range of ways; likewise, this is both a strength and a challenge. The ways in which we as authors, reviewers, editors and readers respond to this diversity may be the greatest strength of the *Journal* and may indicate that it is a good representation of the Network that 'owns' it.

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<sup>7</sup> UCAS lists 122 providers of foundation years and around 100 of these are explicitly universities. However, this doesn't include private provision, whether at private universities or at other providers like Kaplan. See, e.g., <https://www.studyin-uk.com/study-options/foundation/>, accessed 27 June 2024.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Kumbhat, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> The 2018 Foundation Year Network Annual Conference.

<sup>10</sup> The statistics and supporting narrative published on the gov.uk website on 19 October 2023 are important and in many ways helpful (<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/foundation-years-statistics/2021-22>, accessed 27 June 2024). However, in my view, they severely 'flatten' foundation year provision and give little indication of the exceedingly broad and diverse provision that is made across universities and colleges in the UK. The main way in which the diversity of providers is represented on these web pages is by tariff.

Picking up from the introduction to this editorial, the following are some aspects of the diversity of *JFYN* that particularly struck me as I read through all the articles that we have published to date, or, at the point of writing, are about to publish.

### **Diversity of Topics**

The most striking impression that I was left with after reading all the *JFYN* articles was the breadth of topics covered in the *Journal*. I noted that many of the key issues in higher education are tackled in *JFYN*. These range from some of the most fundamental questions like ‘What is a “university?”, what might it be in the future and what ought it to be,<sup>11</sup> including consideration of the place of social justice, critical pedagogy and ‘the deficit model’<sup>12</sup> (to which an annual conference (2019) and much of one issue of the *Journal* were dedicated<sup>13</sup>) and the importance of foundation years,<sup>14</sup> to reflections on ‘value for money’ in higher education<sup>15</sup> and discussion of the ‘Augar Review’<sup>16</sup> and the Office for Students (OfS).<sup>17</sup> Issues around admissions,<sup>18</sup> transitions<sup>19</sup> and student outcomes feature,<sup>20</sup> and there are articles focused on different groups of students who might be considered ‘non-traditional’ due to age,<sup>21</sup> class,<sup>22</sup> social background,<sup>23</sup> nationality,<sup>24</sup> etc., as well as consideration of questions around ‘widening participation’<sup>25</sup> and equality (or equity), diversity and inclusion (EDI)<sup>26</sup> (which relate to the lockdown annual conference theme (in 2020) and the *JFYN* issue that followed). A key aspect of the *Journal* is the wide array of studies related to different pedagogical strategies,<sup>27</sup> methods<sup>28</sup> and philosophies,<sup>29</sup> and

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<sup>11</sup> Ingram (2018).

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Parkes, Mathias and Seal with McGowan and Hall (2018) and Dampier, Baker, Spencely, Edwards, White and Taylor (2019).

<sup>13</sup> The themes of the annual conferences over the years that the *Journal* has existed are as follows:

- 2018, ‘Unity and Diversity in the Foundation Year Experience’ (University of Nottingham)
- 2019, ‘Challenging the Deficit Model across Disciplines’ (University of Sussex)
- 2020, ‘What does “Inclusive Practice” Look Like in a Post-Pandemic Context and Can Foundation Years Lead the Way?’ (University of East Anglia, online)
- 2021, ‘Influence through Innovation and Disruption’ (Keele University, online)
- 2022, ‘Communities of Learning’ (Aston University)
- 2023, ‘Failures – Mistakes, Missteps and Meanders in Foundation Years’ (University of Sheffield)
- 2024, ‘The Foundations of Belonging’ (University of Lincoln)

<sup>14</sup> E.g., Feather, Hazzard, Ludvigsen, Cont and Taylor (2023).

<sup>15</sup> E.g., Clifford (2018, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> E.g., Kumbhat (2022) and Feather, Hazzard, Ludvigsen, Cont and Taylor (2023).

<sup>17</sup> E.g., Feather, Hazzard, Ludvigsen, Cont and Taylor (2023).

<sup>18</sup> E.g., Dunn and Faulkner (2020) and Allan and Anderson (2020).

<sup>19</sup> E.g., Batels-Hardege (2018) and Chivers (2019).

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Allan (2019).

<sup>21</sup> E.g., Chandler, Lockhurst, Vital and Preston (2018) and Dunn (2019).

<sup>22</sup> E.g., Ferguson (2019) and Hale (2020).

<sup>23</sup> E.g., Khumbat (2022).

<sup>24</sup> E.g., Kitwiwattanachai and Demirkan-Jones (2018) and Miani, Wang and Picucci-Huang (2022).

<sup>25</sup> E.g., Allan and Anderson (2020).

<sup>26</sup> E.g., Baker and Spencely (2020) and Dunn and Faulkner (2020).

<sup>27</sup> E.g., Saunders (2020).

<sup>28</sup> E.g., Wheeler (2018).

<sup>29</sup> E.g., Dampier, Baker, Spencely, Edwards, White and Taylor (2019).

analyses of various innovative (and perhaps disruptive) pedagogical tools – digital<sup>30</sup> and other<sup>31</sup> (relating to another wholly online conference (2021) and the *JFYN* issue that followed). There are also articles related to disciplinary specifics like ‘the mathematics problem’<sup>32</sup> or ‘a lockdown curriculum for Arts and Humanities foundation year’<sup>33</sup> (but tackled in ways appropriate to a wide audience). Some articles look at the importance of both formative and summative assessment and feedback,<sup>34</sup> others consider the place of so-called ‘soft skills’ development.<sup>35</sup> A number of articles focus on big-picture student needs like belonging<sup>36</sup> (the theme of the forthcoming 2024 annual conference) and community<sup>37</sup> (to which an earlier annual conference (2022) and much of the associated issue of *JFYN* were dedicated), and others on very specific student needs including learning differences,<sup>38</sup> mental health<sup>39</sup> and wellbeing.<sup>40</sup> There is consideration of the roles of student ‘peers’<sup>41</sup> as well as staff-student co-creation,<sup>42</sup> discussions of academic- or student-led outreach,<sup>43</sup> and numerous approaches to learning from mistakes<sup>44</sup> (to which yet another conference (2023) and much of an issue of *JFYN* were dedicated). A host of articles focus on questions raised by Covid-19,<sup>45</sup> like remote<sup>46</sup> and hybrid teaching,<sup>47</sup> the use of Microsoft Teams,<sup>48</sup> and synchronous, asynchronous and blended learning.<sup>49</sup>

The treatment of these issues is mostly unified by a specific focus on the foundation year context, but there is also a healthy diversity of viewpoints expressed at times – like, for example, on the so-called ‘deficit model’.<sup>50</sup> The ability to hold, express and discuss different points of view is an important and healthy one and we believe that both FYNAC and *JFYN* provide, and we hope that they will continue to provide, supportive and encouraging environments for respectful and courteous but robust discussion about matters on which we – in all our various diverse ways – disagree as well as the many issues on which there is broad agreement among foundation year practitioners.

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<sup>30</sup> E.g., Patten (2020) and Wootton and Neat (2021).

<sup>31</sup> E.g., Gulliver and Edmunds (2021) and Fall and Surendran (2023).

<sup>32</sup> Craven and Sharp (2018).

<sup>33</sup> Ibitson and Newman (2022).

<sup>34</sup> E.g., Hale (2018) and Spencely, Baker and Harrison (2023).

<sup>35</sup> E.g., Garnham and East (2021) and Davenward (2022).

<sup>36</sup> E.g., Becker (2021).

<sup>37</sup> E.g., Broadbent, Patten and Campbell (2021) and Whitton and Stoten (2022).

<sup>38</sup> E.g., Wheeler (2018).

<sup>39</sup> E.g., Saunders (2020) and Edmunds and Gulliver (2021).

<sup>40</sup> E.g., Gulliver and Edmunds (2021) and Shepperd, Dampier, Kellaher, Pervez, Varnes and Hopkins (2023).

<sup>41</sup> Delistathi (2022) and Stickels and Tranter (2022).

<sup>42</sup> E.g., Wheeler (2018) and Broadbent, Patten and Campbell (2021).

<sup>43</sup> Williams (2022).

<sup>44</sup> E.g., Mathias and Staddon (2023) and Allan and Anderson (2023).

<sup>45</sup> E.g., Patten (2020) and Edmunds and Gulliver (2021).

<sup>46</sup> E.g., Saunders (2020).

<sup>47</sup> E.g., Baker and Spencely (2020) and Wootton and Neat (2021).

<sup>48</sup> E.g., Baker and Spencely (2020) and Broadbent, Oatten and Campbell (2021).

<sup>49</sup> E.g., Anderson and Allan (2021) and Whitton and Stoten (2022).

<sup>50</sup> E.g., Howes (2019) and Dunn (2019).

***Diverse Range of Approaches***

There are, of course, diverse ways to undertake research and diverse ways to present such research for an academic journal. Due to the diversity of our authors (on which see the following three sub-sections), there is some inevitability about the different approaches taken in the articles in the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network*. Thus, for example, there are many articles that adopt a typically ‘scientific’ approach: explaining the background or context of the research, then outlining the methodology and methods employed, then describing the ‘experiment’ or ‘project’ in which empirical data is generated, then discussing the ‘findings’ or ‘results’ – often with graphs or diagrams and statistical analysis – before finally drawing conclusions and/or implications from these findings.<sup>51</sup> For the most part, however, because the research is focused on practice, there is at least some degree of subjectivity in the results that are generated and a high proportion of the articles draw on qualitative data rather than or as well as quantitative data upon which to base their conclusions.<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, many of the articles employ some form of practitioner research, drawing, for example, on principles of action research.<sup>53</sup> A number of pieces are explicitly personal reflections on the authors’ experiences of foundation year provision, as students<sup>54</sup> or as members of staff,<sup>55</sup> while others in different ways describe and analyse some aspect of their professional practice<sup>56</sup> – but notably in all cases still drawing on scholarly literature. Some authors apply particular theoretical principles to their analysis of practice,<sup>57</sup> while some discuss theory in a more abstract way.<sup>58</sup> Some articles focus on the application of a particular learning strategy to their practice,<sup>59</sup> others assess the adoption of particular learning tools,<sup>60</sup> and others again derive and apply particular models.<sup>61</sup> The approach in some articles is more historical, drawing extensively on material about higher education in the past in order to reflect on how it operates in the present and might develop in the future,<sup>62</sup> while others explore particular socio-political issues in relation to higher education generally and foundation year provision in particular.<sup>63</sup> Others again adopt a more ‘storied’ approach, at times explicitly drawing on narrative inquiry.<sup>64</sup>

The diversity of approaches is refreshing and means at very least that there is ‘something for everyone’. However, I would encourage readers to engage with approaches to research and writing that may initially seem to present some challenges (as detailed statistical analysis does for me!) – my own experience would suggest that the effort will be repaid as I have learned something new or been provoked to think afresh about my own practice through every article I have read in *JFYN* (that is, all of them!).

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<sup>51</sup> Drummond (2018), Treffert-Thomas and Trott (2020) and Garnham and East (2021) provide good examples.

<sup>52</sup> See, e.g., Davison (2021) and Fall and Surendran (2023).

<sup>53</sup> Dougherty (2022) and Davenward (2022) are examples.

<sup>54</sup> See, e.g., Bartoli-Edwards (2019) and Sheppard, Dampier, Kellaher, Pervez, Varnes and Hopkins (2023).

<sup>55</sup> For example, Wagstaff (2020) and Williams (2022).

<sup>56</sup> Ibitson and Newman (2022) and Wootton and Neat (2022) provide nicely contrasting examples.

<sup>57</sup> See, e.g., Parkes, Mathias and Seal with McGowan and Hall (2018) and Delistathi (2022).

<sup>58</sup> Howes (2019) and Elliott (2023) provide good examples.

<sup>59</sup> For example, Anderson and Allen (2021) and Wootton (2021).

<sup>60</sup> See, e.g., Patten (2020) and Baker and Spencely (2020).

<sup>61</sup> Whitton and Stoten (2022) and Miani, Wang and Picucci-Huang (2022) are examples.

<sup>62</sup> For example, Ingram (2018) and Kumbhat (2022).

<sup>63</sup> Hale (2020) and Ferguson (2019), for example, both consider class in the university context.

<sup>64</sup> See Wheeler (2018).



### ***Authors Involved in Foundation Years in Diverse Ways***

Members of the Foundation Year Network are involved in foundation year provision in a range of different ways and the same is true of those who contribute to the *Journal*. Some journal articles have been authored or co-authored by students who have been through a foundation year. Most articles, though, are written by university staff members and most of those are academic staff. However, a good proportion of articles are written by university staff who support academic teaching in various ways. Of those who are academic staff, some are in full-time foundation year roles (or part-time roles but solely within foundation years) while others teach on foundation year programmes alongside undergraduate and postgraduate teaching. Some are employed on teaching-focused contracts, while others are on research and teaching contracts. Moreover, a variety of different kinds of foundation year programmes are represented: some foundation year programmes take students with few prior educational qualifications, while others have, in the Government's terms, a 'high tariff';<sup>65</sup> some focus on 'widening participation' while others take a broader range of students; some enrol only UK students, others admit only international students and others again take both; some are fully integrated into university departments or faculties while others are much more independent, sometimes geographically as well as in other ways; some are very small operations with few students and a small staff, whereas others are huge with hundreds of students; some have a narrow academic focus, while others are much broader and may offer a range of 'pathways'; most are part of 'public' universities but some are within 'private' universities ... etc.

In many cases, we do not know the specific details about the authors of our articles and the contexts within which they work (though the short biographies that they provide are helpful), nonetheless we do know that they are a diverse bunch: this diversity of ways in which authors are involved in foundation years gives the *Journal* a breadth of perspectives that enhances its offering to Network members and beyond. Nonetheless, there is considerable scope for diversifying even further and adding to the breadth of perspectives represented in *JFYN* – with the added benefits that will bring to the Network and the *Journal*, and, no doubt, additional challenges.

### ***Diversity of Academic and Academic-related Disciplines and Roles***

Department and faculty organisation differs from university to university (to say nothing of colleges) but by most such arrangements, the authors of *JFYN* articles represent all or at least most faculties. Thus we have articles by colleagues in Maths, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Computer Science and General Science; contributions have been made by authors from various Humanities, Arts and Creative Arts disciplines; there have been articles associated with Medicine, Veterinary Science, Psychology, Health Sciences and Biosciences; a good number of Engineering articles have featured; Business and Economics are well represented; contributions have been made by Social Scientists, including from the disciplines of Childhood and Youth Studies, International Relations, Politics and Education; and colleagues involved in English for Academic Purpose and English Language Teaching have also contributed. In addition, we are delighted to have included articles by colleagues who teach Academic Skills or are involved in Learning Development, as well as those with roles in Learning Technology and Outreach. Plus, of course, we have a student who has written an article and other students who have made contributions to articles. Even as I typed up this paragraph from my notes I am impressed by the breadth of experience and expertise in academic and academic-related disciplines informing the articles we

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<sup>65</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/foundation-years-statistics/2021-22>, accessed 27 June 2024.

publish. Nonetheless, there remain disciplines that are not represented and we would love to expand on this diversity, too.

Of course, just like diversity in other areas, there are great benefits and significant challenges in this. The main challenge, I think, is ensuring that what colleagues from all these disciplines and roles contribute has broad applicability for colleagues across the Network: in my view, our authors do a good job of this, but perhaps we as editors need to be more ‘encouraging’ of our authors to ensure that their articles have this kind of wide appeal. This particular area of diversity also makes us as editors highly dependent on our reviewers – and to them we are immensely grateful for the help they provide in maintaining rigour across this spectrum of academic and academic-related work included in the *Journal*.

### ***Authors From a Diverse Collection of Universities***

There are around 166 universities in the UK,<sup>66</sup> and UCAS lists a total of 410 universities and colleges that offer higher education qualifications.<sup>67</sup> Of these, according to UCAS, 122 HEIs offer foundation year programmes, providing a total of 4464 courses for 2024 entry.<sup>68</sup> In an article for the first issue of the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network*,<sup>69</sup> I divided English universities into pre-92 Russell Group universities, other pre-92 universities, post-92 universities (mostly former polytechnic colleges) and new universities (achieving their university charter in the twenty-first century). All of these groupings are represented in articles in the *Journal*: we have articles from Durham University, King’s College London (KCL), University of Leeds, University of Nottingham (including the Ningbo campus in China), University of Sheffield, University of Southampton and University of Warwick (Russell Group); University of St Andrews, Aston University, University of East Anglia (UEA), University of Essex, University of Hull, Keele University, University of Leicester, Loughborough University, University of Reading, University of Surrey and University of Sussex (other pre-92); Liverpool John Moores University, University of Lincoln, London Southbank University, Northumbria University, Plymouth University, Sheffield Hallam University and University of Westminster (post-92); and University of Bolton, University of Northampton, Birmingham Newman University, University of Roehampton and University of South Wales (new universities).

All this is to say that a fair cross-section of different kinds of universities are represented, covering a wide geographical area, as shown in figure 1. However, figure 1 also indicates that there is plenty of scope for more articles from HEIs in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales (though the university of South Wales has produced its share of articles!) and it would be great to see contributions from more universities that offer foundation year programmes as well as articles from colleges.

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<sup>66</sup> Joy Hunter (2023) provides a list of these.

<sup>67</sup> UCAS (2024a)

<sup>68</sup> See UCAS (2024b). This fails to provide the full picture because it includes City of Liverpool College University Centre and University Centre Grimsby that appear not to offer foundation year programmes but just foundation degrees. It also does not include the private Arden University, Regent University, Richmond American University London and the University of Law, which do offer foundation year programmes, nor does it include the private provision made for international students by organisations like Kaplan.

<sup>69</sup> Ingram (2018).



Figure 1. Location of the institutions where authors work. (Generated using Google maps.)

This, along with the preceding sub-sections, demonstrates the breadth of experience of the university foundation year sector represented in the *Journal*, and it undoubtedly adds considerably to the value of *JFYN* for its members and others in this sector and beyond. Nonetheless, there is certainly scope for expanding this breadth within the university foundation year sector ... and there is also a notable gap in terms of foundation year provision in other HEIs. We would welcome contributions from colleagues in even newer 'new' universities and private universities as well as those who deliver foundation year programmes in colleges.

**Unity**

I am tempted to work through my five 'unity' points in sufficient detail to balance out the 'diversity' sub-sections above. But I won't! (The article is long enough already.) So, very briefly, these are the key areas of unity that I found to characterise most if not all of our articles, whether explicitly or implicitly.

*Focus on Foundation Year Practice*

Perhaps this is obvious. However, the key thing that unites the articles in the *Journal* is that they are written by foundation year practitioners primarily for other foundation year practitioners. In this sense, while we strive to ensure academic rigour, *JFYN* is first and foremost a professional practitioner journal, intended to help its readers reflect on and improve their practice. The *Journal of the Foundation Year Network*, is thus genuinely a publication by and for the (foundation year) people.

*Clearly Evidenced Commitment to Our Students*

A crucial aspect of foundation year practice is that it is focused on students. As I read through the articles, I was struck by clear evidence that a commitment to foundation year students seemed to undergird everything that was discussed – we are, of course, engaged in an 'academic exercise', but the *Journal* shows that for foundation year practitioners this is generally much more than *just* an academic exercise. This, I believe, is an important way in which the *Journal* has significance beyond our immediate sector.

*Determination to Seek the Best Ways to Facilitate those Students' Learning*

This student-focused practice is firstly a pedagogical one – almost all the articles in *JFYN* are focused in one way or another on teaching and learning. Thus, the rigorous reflection on practice, informed by research and scholarship, contributes to the broader Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

*A Concern About the Wellbeing of our Students*

But, going by the evidence of *JFYN* articles (as well as FYNAC and other FYN events), foundation year practice is also typically characterised by active concern about student wellbeing. This, of course, is true of many of our colleagues in the wider higher education sector, but I suspect that it is particularly and on average more obviously the case for those in our narrower foundation year sector.

*Openness to Learn Ourselves From What Others in the FYN and Beyond are Doing*

Perhaps this is the most subjective of my impressions from reading all the *JFYN* articles – and I typically have much the same subjective impression at FYNAC each year. My sense is that rather than 'parading' the innovative things that they are doing, foundation year colleagues usually offer their journal contributions for readers' own reflection and response so that together we can strive to continually improve our work as foundation year practitioners. One important piece of evidence to back up my impressions is the increasing extent to which authors now engage with prior *JFYN* articles.

## Conclusion

The *Journal of the Foundation Year Network* is a publication written, reviewed and edited by a diverse collection of foundation year practitioners for a diverse readership of foundation year practitioners. The *Journal* is designed to further the objects of the Foundation Year Network by supporting the Network's annual conferences and developing the discussions that take place there, by fostering careful and scholarly reflection on foundation year practice in all its diversity, by providing a site for academic and scholarly activity, by helping members in their own continuing professional development, and by showcasing diversity (alongside appreciable unity of purpose) within foundation year provision as well as acknowledging diverse routes into higher education and considering how foundation year provision finds its place (or, more accurately, its places) within this diversity.

The diversity that characterises the Foundation Year Network and is clearly evident in the *Journal* is both a strength and a challenge. The Network and its journal display a unity of purpose that enables them to function effectively for members of the FYN: as journal editors we wish to celebrate and extend the diversity of *JFYN*, while also highlighting and fostering those things we as foundation year practitioners typically hold in common and inviting others who provide 'non-traditional' routes into higher education to contribute to our deliberations as appropriate. In particular, the *Journal* would benefit from contributions that further demonstrate the diverse nature of foundation year provision, particularly where those are also characterised by the Network's and the *Journal's* unity of purpose. This might be achieved, for example, by more collaborative pieces with authors from different disciplines or from different HEIs, by continuing the trend of authors engaging with earlier *JFYN* articles, and by articles in the same issue that in appropriate ways provide diverse perspectives on the same topic. No doubt the FYN Scholarship Group will help to further this aim.

We encourage colleagues who present at the annual conference to consider writing up their presentation as a scholarly article. We also encourage colleagues, whether or not they present at FYNAC, to consider writing an article based on their own foundation year practice.

And, of course, we encourage colleagues to browse this sixth volume of the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network* and to read any articles that are of interest to them. Perhaps such reading will prompt you to reflect about some aspect of your own practice ... maybe leading to your own article in the future. This publication is offered to you, the diverse Foundation Year People, by the diverse Foundation Year People who wrote, reviewed and edited it, in the confident hope that together we can continue to develop and improve our diverse foundation year (and similar) practice for the good of our students.

### **Volume 6 of the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network***

This volume displays many of the aspects of diversity and unity that I have described throughout the editorial. The first article, written by staff and students from different disciplines at Liverpool John Moores University, argues for the importance of foundation years for university teaching more widely because of the teaching innovation that often characterises these programmes. There then follow five articles that in different ways illustrate this argument. The first of these is a reflective piece by a team who teach on the Engineering and Physical Sciences Foundation Year at University of Surrey, focused on the development of an innovative assessment they have been developing since 2018. The second is by two members of the International Education Institute at University of St Andrews, and considers the use of an online platform in the delivery of English for Academic Purposes. The third of these articles is a collaborative piece by a colleague

from the University of South Wales and one from the University of Surrey who together discuss the use of Play-Doh in anatomy teaching. The fourth is by an Economics lecturer at King's College London, who discusses pluralism in foundation year teaching. And the fifth is a collaborative article by a lecturer and an academic skills officer from University of Southampton, discussing peer review in supporting Engineering students with their writing. The next two articles focus explicitly on mistake-making, the theme of last year's annual conference: two colleagues who deliver the Science with a Foundation Year at University of Nottingham consider ways to help provide students with space to learn from mistakes, then two mathematicians from Durham University discuss why a pre-arrival intervention to combat maths anxiety for their students did not work. It then seems highly appropriate to finish with article co-authored by staff, students and graduates from different disciplines, who write about student transition with a particular focus on wellbeing.

### Acknowledgments

I, Doug, wrote this article, and although at times I have spoken on behalf of the Network or the editorial board, I take full responsibility for what appears in this editorial, including any errors. While I have, of course, sought to accurately represent the Network and the editorial board, the words here are mine and mine alone. Having said this, I am immensely grateful to my fellow editors: to Peter and Sarah for being with me on this editorly journal journey from the start, and to Anna for agreeing to join this motley crew! I am also grateful to the Executive Committee of the Foundation Year Network for their unfailing support of the *Journal* and their patience when the journal that belongs to the Network they oversee has appeared much later in the day than intended. *JFYN* would not be what it is without the many authors who have offered contributions, whether or not those contributions have been accepted. Nor would it be as good as it is, nor carry the weight that it does, without the pool of reviewers upon whom we draw year by year. And, of course, the whole venture would be a bit pointless without you, the readers. I think the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network* exemplifies some of the best of what makes the collection of foundation year practitioners (and some others) that make up the Foundation Year Network – in all its diversity and largely unity of purpose – what it is. Thank you!

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Doug Ingram teaches on the Foundation Arts programme at University of Nottingham. For a number of years he was Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Foundation Year Network. Latterly his main contribution to the Network has been as an editor of the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network*, which he founded in 2018 with fellow editors, Sarah Hale and Peter Watts.