

Introduction

It is fitting to begin this issue by expressing thanks to the authors and reviewers who have worked to develop these articles, and made this publication possible, in the context of such a challenging calendar year. And, naturally, the challenges presented by Covid-19 are reflected throughout the issue. There has been widespread discussion of the common challenges faced within Higher Education in the context of the pandemic. This has involved the sharing of insights and best practice as staff responded rapidly and creatively to the shifting demands placed upon them. It has also involved reflecting on the longer term implications of the changes that have come about. The Foundation Year Network's Annual Conference (9-22 July 2020) very much represented this kind of discussion, with Dr Mark Walmsley (University of East Anglia) doing an outstanding job in leading the organisation and delivery of the conference as an online event with the revised theme question, "What does 'inclusive practice' look like in a post-pandemic context and can foundation years lead the way?"

Though the challenges faced by foundation year staff and students reflect those experienced in Higher Education more generally, the Annual Conference offered a lens through foundation year provision into particular aspects of these as well as responses and initiatives which have the potential to inform developments in the wider sector. Topics of discussion included adapting support for transition both into foundation year and undergraduate study; the experience of students – especially 'non-traditional' students – in being required to turn the home environment into a study environment; adapting student academic and welfare support for the online context; supporting the wellbeing of staff as well as students; and also central pedagogical issues, particularly in relation to student engagement. The conference also offered a context for collaboration and mutual support in responding to these challenges.

The articles in this issue build on a range of these topics. This issue begins with three articles addressing different aspects of online learning, followed by two papers related to foundation year admissions. The context for both of these topics continues to shift rapidly, with development of online pedagogies as well as admissions processes being driven by multiple factors. This means that what is offered here provides a springboard for consideration of topics that will continue to dominate discussion in the foundation year – and wider Higher Education context – in the coming years. The following two articles present disciplinary-specific research and reflection (Creative Arts, and Science and Engineering) developed in the pre-Covid-19 context and point also to the diversity of foundation year provision and approaches represented within the Foundation Year Network and in this journal. The closing article, on the 'Class Politics of Foundation Years', brings together consideration of both foundation year staff and students in terms of inclusive practice – specifically in relation to the role of foundation years as a mechanism for working class inclusion in higher education. In this way the issue concludes with discussion of certain key challenges for foundation year provision, but also its potential value for students, practitioners and institutions.

In 2019 it was the shadow of the Augar review that provided an impetus for consideration of the question of the value of foundation years and their effectiveness for those who otherwise would not access Higher Education. Many new questions are raised by the pandemic and addressed in this issue, yet these previous questions remain pertinent and will no doubt need

to be addressed in new ways in light of the changes and challenges that Covid-19 has brought about – and will continue to bring about – in Higher Education and our broader society. Therefore we continue to encourage submissions to the journal on these and other topics as well as those developed for and through the Annual Conference.

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