

Editorial

LUCY ATKINSON, SARAH HALE AND DOUG INGRAM

Arden University, University of Sheffield and University of Nottingham

Introduction

This volume of the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network* is late! For this we apologise. It has fallen foul of some of the many pressures that we, as foundation year practitioners and as academics in the broader Higher Education sector, face as we come to the end of over two years of Covid-19 pandemic and anticipate a continuation, if not escalation, of industrial action. One result of this lateness, though, is that we have the opportunity to dedicate this volume to Darren Campbell, a valued colleague who passed away unexpectedly on 6 April 2022. We believe that the volume is a fitting tribute and demonstrates ways in which the Network that Darren served is committed to the values that he espoused and demonstrated in his own practice. Darren was the driving force behind this year's Foundation Year Network Annual Conference, fittingly entitled, 'Communities of Learning'. The articles in this volume, commencing with Darren's own contribution, alongside his colleagues, Rebecca Broadbent and Amy Patten, are testimony to colleagues across the country who dedicate themselves to serving foundation year students, determined to offer them the highest quality of education possible and, importantly, to include all these students, whatever their background and current life circumstances into welcoming communities of learning.

The articles fall roughly into three categories, 'building community', 'developing innovative teaching' and 'thinking about assessment', and this has been the rationale for their arrangement in the volume. It is notable, however, that there is considerable crossover and some articles would readily fit in more than one category. Ellie Davison's article is a great example: it would fit well in either the teaching or assessment categories and thus both provides an appropriate bridge between them, but it also helpfully demonstrates that teaching and assessment should not be considered in isolation from each other. Perhaps this is true of all three categories; perhaps it is especially true for colleagues across the Network who are deeply committed to their *foundation year* students. We learn about education and the student experience from colleagues across the HE sector, of course, but in many ways colleagues across the Foundation Year Network are involved in innovative practices that should be emulated by the wider HE community as these colleagues build communities of learning, develop innovative methods of teaching and seek to assess students in ways that help these students realise their considerable potential in their ongoing studies and in life outside and beyond these studies.

We are particularly impressed by the ways in which to some extent all the articles draw on the challenges that the pandemic threw up and turn those challenges into opportunities to reconsider our practice and make it better in a post-pandemic world, informed by changes that varying degrees of lockdown and self-isolation thrust upon us. We are also impressed with the

broad literature base that informs the articles, increasingly drawing among many other things on articles in previous volumes of this journal! We are encouraged to observe colleagues employing and further developing a range of innovative teaching strategies. We are also encouraged to note the range of ‘technology’ used to facilitate teaching – from simple potatoes in student kitchens to highly sophisticated digital tools integrated into university virtual learning environments. And, therefore, we are convinced that this journal, despite the challenges we have faced in getting it ‘to press’, is a valuable resource for all colleagues who are committed to providing the best possible education and student experience for students at university and college – and particularly, of course, those colleagues working with foundation year students. Thank you to all who have made this volume of the *Journal of the Foundation Year Network* possible: authors, reviewers and editors ... and not forgetting our readers! Thank you also for your patience.

The articles

Building community

In the first article, **Broadbent, Patten and Campbell** open with the statement that ‘community is central to the human experience and is undoubtedly beneficial to the student experience and education’. Facing the challenge of building community among their students in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, they describe and assess their use of Microsoft Teams to facilitate community-building in personal tutor groups. While there were areas for improvement, their use of Teams in this way was seen by both students and staff to be helpful. A key question is how the creation of *virtual* communities of learning might feature as part of community-building post-pandemic, which raises the important, and challenging, issue of the possibility of some kind of hybrid approach.

Edmunds and Gulliver describe how they sought to provide support for students during the pandemic, when their university adopted a blended learning approach. They worked hard to develop ‘a dynamic, responsive partnership’ with their students, which involved regular provision of appropriate information alongside the opportunity for students to offer feedback on any aspect of their course. They state that ‘an unexpected result of this was that we built a collaborative learning community and started hearing our students in ways we were not experiencing when teaching primarily face-to-face’. Again questions arise about the implications of this for practice beyond the pandemic, but Edmunds and Gulliver also ask important questions around the sustainability of the support they offered students ... and what support is needed for staff to continue to support students in these ways.

Community again features as a key theme in **Becker’s** article, though through the metaphor of a flock of birds ‘that had landed at university and was now firmly identified as an entity in itself, but an entity that, like any flock of birds, will remain intact even whilst some separate off from the flock from time to time’. Becker reflects on her experience of ‘designing, launching and teaching on an Arts and Humanities foundation year’, working through six misconceptions that she brought to ‘this new teaching experience’. Although this is a reflective piece, Becker engages with relevant literature and comes to various conclusions that might help address such misconceptions that I suspect are widespread among our non-foundation-year colleagues. Returning to the theme of ‘community’, one conclusion Becker describes is the ‘accidental’ sense of belonging that resulted from students’ membership of learning groups.

Developing innovative teaching

We see a return to the use of Teams in **Wootton and Neat's** article, but this time in combination with an innovative use of Learning Pools' Adapt Builder e-learning package to facilitate a complete rethink of the way Mathematics modules were offered to large classes during lockdown. A flipped learning approach was adopted in which Adapt Builder was used for asynchronous delivery and Teams for the synchronous engagement with students. The experience of teaching in this way revealed many benefits, as well as numerous challenges, and led these authors, too, to consider ways in which some kind of hybrid delivery might retain the benefits and overcome the challenges.

In their second article, **Gulliver and Edmunds** also turn to the delivery of teaching in lockdown, their focus being on practical skills for biology students. However, rather than innovative use of an e-learning package, they turned to students' own kitchens for their innovation (in tandem with the use of Padlets, Learning Science laboratory simulations and Blackboard). As described in other articles, here, too, it seems that innovation born out of necessity led to unexpected consequences that raise questions about how teaching might develop creatively in the post-pandemic world – and hence their closing words apply to all of us who teach in HE (and elsewhere, no doubt): 'It is our hope ... that we as educators continue to think imaginatively about the teaching and learning strategies we employ.'

Anderson and Allan discuss the use of 'active learning' in their teaching, something they used before Covid-19 hit but employed to a much greater extent during the pandemic. They note that although students saw the usefulness of active learning activities (in this case used asynchronously), they nonetheless accessed content-based materials to a greater extent. Students, it appears, may theoretically see the value in innovative approaches to teaching and learning but still choose to draw on more 'traditional' material with which they are more familiar. Anderson and Allan highlight research that has shown that active learning activities promote a deep approach to learning and facilitate the development of higher order thinking skills and conclude their article by describing changes they will enact to encourage students to make more use of such activities.

Thinking about assessment

Davison's article forms something of a bridge between innovative teaching and assessment as she describes in detail a project in which flipped learning significantly increased exam performance for students with lower previous academic attainment. Davison acknowledges mixed responses to flipped learning in the pedagogical literature but provides persuasive evidence of its impact on many of her students, despite students' mixed feelings about its introduction. She concludes by asking whether this post-pandemic period might be 'the moment to harness the power of flipping the curriculum to ensure that face-to-face time with students is cognitively rich and to boost exam preparation for those students who have the most to gain?'

Wootton, in his second contribution, turns his attention to 'authentic assessment', which is defined as 'a form of assessment in which students are asked to perform real-world tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of knowledge and skills' (Mueller). Wootton explains something of the theory behind authentic assessment but accepts a continuing role of 'inauthentic assessment'. He then describes in detail the process of designing a foundation year computer science module based on authentic assessment, using the very helpful 'prompt questions' introduced in the first part of the article. He, like other authors in this volume, argues that the Covid-19 pandemic required changes that have had a positive impact on our practice: in this case, an increased focus on the need for authentic assessment. He concludes that "inauthentic"

assessments will always be a key part of the student university journey' but contends that 'complementing these with authentically assessed modules is greatly to the benefit of the students.'

Granham and East focus on the age-old question of time-management in relation to assessment tasks but employ recently developed digital technology (in the shape of Talis Elevate) to assess their efforts to help students with their time-management as they worked on a research portfolio assessment. Granham and East realistically evaluate where their endeavours have been particularly successful and where there remains work to be done – and this evaluation is informed by the objective statistics generated by the analytics facilities offered by Talis Elevate. The article, therefore, achieves two particular aims: it presents an innovative approach to helping students with their time-management, and it demonstrates the effective use of analytics in evaluating their innovation.

We hope you enjoy reading these articles and find much to inform your own thinking and practice!

Doug Ingram, Acting Lead Editor
Sarah Hale, Editor
Lucy Atkinson, Editor