

The Wellbeing Experience of Foundation Year Students Transitioning to the Foundation Year in a Higher Education Institution

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Whilst transitions through education are well researched, this paper focuses on the transition to university for foundation year students with attention on student well-being. For this a set of semi-structured interviews were performed and analysed using thematic content analysis. The data highlights some of the negative emotions and feelings experienced by these students and how these negatives dissipate throughout the time in the foundation year. These negatives are replaced with positive emotions and feelings as the foundation year progresses, especially in terms of confidence and belonging. This research was a student-staff partnership and as such provides authentic access to student voices discussing their own experience during this transition into higher education. From the research, short podcasts were created that are now shared with incoming students and are useful for both new students and for staff.

Introduction

Whilst there is no firm definition of what constitutes a transition in a human's life, it is considered a period of time when an individual experiences major changes (Lenz, 2001). For students, these include transition into, through and out of university. The transition into higher education (HE) has been widely studied, and its particular challenges have been identified and discussed (e.g., Cage *et al.*, 2021; Briggs *et al.*, 2012). Data from HESA (2023) reflects these challenges, showing a first-year non-completion rate in the UK of 5.3% among 'young' students and 11.9% among mature students in 2019-20. Students entering university are often (though far from exclusively) of an age where they are at the end of the transition to adulthood (Moshman, 2011), a time of physical and mental development (Harris 2010), and likely to be adopting roles of greater independence (Lenz, 2001). At this point students will have more autonomy than previously over their behavioural choices and environment (Harris, 2010) and are required to create a new identity for themselves as higher education students (Briggs *et al.*, 2012). Briggs *et al.*

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(2012) note the degree to which transition poses challenges ‘to all the parties involved’, with the related observation that the learner in transition is a very small part of larger institutional and societal processes. Gravett (2019) leads discussion of transition with the term ‘troubling’, though acknowledges that there is potential value in discomfort as a part of learning. The degree of social displacement inherent in transition is also noted by Briggs *et al.* (2012), accompanied by the comment that this is intensified for students from more diverse backgrounds.

To counter the perceived challenges of transition to HE, a number of studies examine and suggest ways of smoothing this process for the student and for the institution. Transition pedagogy is identified as a term by Kift and Nelson (2005), stressing that retaining and engaging students in their first year of university is very much the responsibility of the receiving institution and its academic and non-academic staff, as well as of the individual student. Kift *et al.* (2010) see transition pedagogy as being underpinned by principles that include engagement and diversity, resulting in targeted strategies designed to improve the first year experience. They echo Buote *et al.* (2007) in championing peer mentoring and show the importance of orientation as an ongoing process (rather than a single event). Helping students develop a sense of belonging at the new institution is similarly seen as supporting transition and thereby easing the impact of the change in studies, including those by Jones *et al.* (2018) and Gale and Parker (2014).

Gale and Parker (*ibid*) note that the term ‘transition’ itself has often been used uncritically in literature, with its precise meaning taken for granted. They stress the degree to which the importance of understanding transition has grown as higher proportions of populations of OECD nations have taken up university study in the twenty-first century, in line with government policies to increase student numbers, which has led to a wider demographic taking up places at HEIs. In answer to their criticism of a previous lack of definition of transition, they offer their own, of transition being ‘the capability to navigate change’ – a significantly more active interpretation than literature that suggests a change that will, with a sense of inevitability, happen over time (e.g. Colley, 2007; Lent *et al.*, 2007). Based on a broad review of transitions literature, Gale and Parker (2014) offer three conceptualisations of the term, identifying bodies of literature that view transition firstly as ‘Induction’, secondly as ‘Development’, and thirdly as ‘Becoming’.

Transition as induction, according to Gale and Parker (*ibid*), responds to seeing students as progressing through a number of phases, in linear fashion, facing complex challenges along the way and all the more so if they have come from diverse backgrounds. Induction, best managed by the institution, is seen through this lens as a solution with related initiatives to address the potential issues such as orientation/familiarisation with the campus and relevant staff, and provision of information regarding procedures and assessment on a ‘just-in-time’ basis. The authors point out, however, that such an approach, despite the support offered to students, fails to recognise the institutional privileging inherent in the hidden curriculum and is therefore likely to reinforce existing statuses.

Transition as development (*ibid*) also sees transition in linear fashion but as a point where student identities change, for example through separation from home and/or school, through interaction with new groups and finally integration by new groups. Connection with time is looser, but connection with space matters more. Relevant student support might include mentoring, field placements or service learning opportunities. Nonetheless, the authors point out that these approaches are also aimed at maintaining the status quo, and only look at opportunities for development within the individual or group, rather than at an institutional level.

Transition as becoming is seen by Gale and Parker (*ibid*) as rejecting the views of transition as expressed above, with much more emphasis on the variabilities and complexities of real life. Such normative views of transition, they argue, fail to capture the diversity of students’ lives, preferring to view it with its dimensions of subjectivity and flux. Failing to recognise the perspec-

tives of students at this stage they view as counterproductive, whereas transition as becoming embeds diverse identities, along with varied ways of being and doing, into the curricula and pedagogies of universities.

Where widening demographics have impacted the student population generally, this is true especially of the make-up of foundation year cohorts in the UK (and elsewhere). If there is a need to attend more closely to an understanding of transition experiences of the whole student body, there is surely a need to concentrate efforts even more at Foundation level, where the characteristics are significantly more varied than among the Year 1 entrants. Figure 1 highlights these differences in the UK: the increased diversity at Foundation level is of race and of socio-economic background; there are significantly more male students at FY level than in First Year; and the discrepancies regarding the percentage of mature students, and of those who enter university having achieved qualifications at A level or equivalent, are especially notable.

Foundation Year	Characteristic	Year 1
64%	21 years old or above	19%
56%	Highest previous qualification is Level 3	91%
54%	White	66%
14%	Asian	13%
14%	Black	9%
46%	Non-white	34%
51%	Male	42%
49%	Female	58%
17%	Polar quintile 1	13%
18%	Polar quintile 2	16%
20%	Polar quintile 5	29%

Figure 1: Measures of diversity in Foundation Year cohorts compared to Year 1 students at UK HEIs for academic year 2021-22. Source: Gov.uk (2023) 'Foundation Year participation, provision and outcomes at HE providers'.

When looking at the transition to an HE institution in general, significant numbers of students report homesickness (Paul and Brier, 2001) and isolation (Brooks and DuBois, 1995), as well as friction with the norms in HE (Katartzi and Hayward, 2020). Student mental health at times of transition is considered in depth by Cage *et al.* (2021), who examine transitions into, through and out of university, noting the importance of student mental health and wellbeing as a public health issue, especially given the high numbers reporting mental health conditions (81,960 students in 2018-19, according to HESA statistics from 2020). Through interviews with students and staff on the topic of what might contribute to enabling better wellbeing of students in relation to their transitions, Cage *et al.* (ibid) make recommendations including helping students to reduce the unknowns, 'normalising wellbeing discourses', supporting 'continuous relationships with staff' and helping students to find 'a sense of belonging at university'.

There is acknowledgment in suggestions for further research from both Gale and Parker (2014) and Gravett (2019) of the need for more recognition of the variety of student lives, of the range of transition experiences by students from widely diverse backgrounds, of the highly individual nature of many of these experiences, and of the need for universities to respond to knowledge and ways of knowing in marginalised ways. Gravett (ibid) recommends innovative research which allows students to share their own lived experiences in new and creative ways. There has been work investigating the transition experienced by international students (Jones *et al.*, 2018) and students transitioning into their first year of an Undergraduate degree (Klaiber

et al., 2018) as well as the experience of students coming from non-traditional backgrounds (Katartzi and Hayward, 2020; McMillan, 2014). However, there has been little work looking at home domiciled students' experience of the transition to a foundation year in a UK HE institution.

Research question

How do foundation year students perceive their transition to higher education with regards to their wellbeing?

Methods

In this study we implemented a pragmatic approach with the aim to explore students' experience of transition into the foundation year with researchers who themselves were foundation year student alumni, and chose a student-staff partnership as a suitable approach for this investigation. This particular choice acknowledged the overwhelming importance of the student voice in understanding how and to what extent transition impacts overall student experience. Collaboration by students with staff may take widely varying forms. This one aimed to go beyond the initial stages identified by Healey *et al.* (2014) of consultation, involvement or participation, to manifest itself as a 'partnership' in the sense of a 'collaboration between an institution ... and student, involving joint ownership and decision-making both over the process and outcome'. Curran (2017) notes that it is far from new to view a university as a 'community of learners (students and staff) working together to advance scholarship', referring back in this context as this being the vision of Wilhelm von Humbolt when founding the University of Berlin in 1810.

Curran (*ibid*) is clear that genuine partnerships are not automatic and that issues around time, availability and sustaining partnerships as students progress can be challenging. Partnerships as a result can take many shapes. Despite the challenges, there is significant potential value in an effective partnership project, which offers the opportunity outlined by Healey *et al.* (2014) for 'critical reflection on existing relationships, identities, processes and structures'. Such processes bring the enticing possibility of underpinning real transformation of learning experiences, when the unique identity of each partner in combination brings the potential to lead to 'new ways of understanding, acting and doing' (*ibid*).

In our context, while the overall theme of 'students in transition' was staff-driven, the shape of the project – featuring four student researchers in conversation with other former Foundation Year students, in semi-structured interviews, recorded and edited into podcasts – was very much driven by the student partners. Thereafter, much in line with the concerns outlined by Curran (2017) above, roles emerged on a more pragmatic basis depending largely on availability, with one student in the data analysis team, the bulk of the writing up undertaken by staff, with review by two of the student partners – in other words, conforming to no firmly established model of student staff-partnership roles.

Sample

Recruitment was through targeted personal contacts, and subsequently snowballing, intended to match participants to general profiles which gave a broad range of characteristics and diverse experiences and perspectives for analysis: e.g., current foundation year students, former foundation year students, commuting students, different gender. Snowball sampling involves

recruitment of participants through referrals from initial contacts. This approach was advantageous in this study as it facilitated the exploratory nature of the research and allowed the targeting of specific experiences within the population (Daniel, 2012). Snowball sampling is good for providing illustrative examples and allowed us to target a limited number of participants. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of snowballing including the potential bias in the sample and the risk that a particular element was missed from the sample (Daniel, 2012). Despite these limitations, the benefits of snowball sampling outweighed its drawbacks in the present study.

All participants were from a single Higher Education Institution in the Southeast of England and had taken part in one of the foundation year programmes at the Institution. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the interviews.

Data collection

Data were collected and recorded using semi-structured interviews. Interview questions were created, and interviews were conducted, by student researchers who had experience of a foundation year. The interview questions were developed collaboratively by student researchers and two members of staff who teach on the foundation year to ensure relevance and appropriateness for the study's objectives. Interviews were conducted online using Zoom at the participants' convenience and lasted from approximately 23 to 53 minutes.

The interview questions covered a range of topics relating to the participants' experiences and perspective on 'fitting in', 'independent learning' and 'the scary bits and coping'. Audio was transcribed and moderated for data analysis.

Data analysis

Thematic content analysis was used to interrogate the data and create themes guided by the six steps laid out by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a flexible and widely used method for identifying, analysing, and reporting themes within qualitative data. This approach allowed us systematically to identify recurring themes across the data set. It was chosen due to the exploratory nature of these research questions, allowing us to capture expected and unexpected themes within the data set and to benefit from its ability to provide rich insights into participants' perspectives and experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The transcripts were first read then re-read by a member of staff who teaches on the foundation year and a student researcher to familiarise themselves with the data set. Repeated information pertaining to the wider research question rather than the interview questions was considered important and categorised as initial codes and then organised into broader themes through an iterative process of data coding and theme development. To enhance the rigour and trustworthiness of the analysis the two coders and an independent researcher who had not been involved with the initial analysis compared findings to ensure consistency and reliability. Any discrepancies in the coding were resolved through discussion and consensus was reached within the team. For the purposes of this article, codes which emerged under the thematic heading of 'Feelings and Mental Health' were prioritised for discussion and analysis.

This research was given favourable ethical approval by the university's ethics committee.

Results and discussion

Demographics

All participants were from the same HE institution, had experience of the foundation year and then transitioned into an undergraduate degree. Participants were from a range of programmes - Economics and Finance (x2), Business School, Biosciences (x2), Electrical Engineering (x2), Maths and Physics). All students were home students apart from participant 8 who was an international student, and the gender ratio was 50:50 male: female.

Findings

In an era where mental health has a social prominence and understanding that contrasts with less enlightened attitudes of only the fairly recent past, it is perhaps not surprising to hear current foundation year students discuss related issues openly and objectively, with a clear sense of how good mental health connects with success at university: 'if your subject revolves around your mind, you need to make sure you keep it in good health' (Participant 3); 'your academic skills ... interplay with ... mental health as well' (Participant 3). Feelings that students express surrounding potential and actual transitions from home and secondary education to beginning tertiary education at Foundation level are undoubtedly in the same vein as those explored in previous research when analysing senses of stress, social displacement, instability, vulnerability and low confidence expressed by students making similar moves directly into degree programmes at first year (e.g., Leese, 2010; Briggs *et al.*, 2012; Lenz, 2001).

For this particular study, the pertinent queries in terms of mental health are around whether Foundation level study is associated with an entirely congruent transition experience to first year entry, or whether any differences between the two entry levels emerge from the data collected. Do any of the insights gathered suggest, for example, that a potential university student with a history of anxiety might be better directed into Foundation than into Year 1? Students in this study highlighted a range of potential or actual negative emotions and concerns arising from the transition from school or college to university (for all of the students in this sample were moving directly from secondary to tertiary education, i.e. were 18 -19 years old at the time of this transition). Two out of the eight were continuing to live at home and commute to university; others moved into shared university accommodation. Many of the emotions cited were general and were coded variously as 'feeling overwhelmed', 'uncertainty', 'anxiety', 'homesickness', 'loneliness', 'feeling sad', 'being alone'. These kinds of expression dominated, although there were also other more specific concerns related to the new context, coded as 'academic unease', 'unfamiliar territory' and 'exam stress'.

Of the negative emotions expressed around the prospect of (or very early stages of) the transition, it would not be an exaggeration to say that among the sample group those negative feelings almost entirely dissipated by the time of the study, which took place late in the foundation year for some and late in first year for others. By this stage the actual lived experience of Foundation and its place in transition to university at higher levels was couched in far more positive terms. Elements of the conversations by students reflecting on their feelings towards their foundation year experiences at the point of interview were largely coded in very positive terms, both generally: 'increase in confidence', 'building confidence', 'foundation year aids settling', 'foundation year = fun'; and with respect to the academic dimension of the experience: 'importance of friendly staff on FY: possibility of connecting on a personal level', 'academic ease', 'study as distraction from problems'. The last of these adds a note of realism:

foundation year does not eliminate problems entirely, but these comments suggest added resilience brought about by the experience.

The challenge in this kind of study, as noted above, is to try and assess the degree to which the foundation year itself has benefitted students in ways that would not, or might not, have happened as general maturation processes at this age and stage, and in particular to disassociate feelings and changes in feelings from the counterfactual experience of transitioning directly from school or college into first year of university study. While many of the reflections in the recorded conversations might apply in either context, as part of the semi-structured interview process the students nonetheless drew out a number of ways in which they feel the foundation context is different and has benefitted them. Examples of these explored below align well with ideas outlined above by Cage *et al.* (2021), and include making new friends among course mates, developing close professional relationships with teaching staff, increases in confidence, and developing strategies to cope with pressure at later stages of their studies.

It would be disingenuous not to acknowledge the likely impact of *confirmation bias*: 'the preference for supporting as opposed to conflicting information' (Jonas *et al.*, 2001) in this study. Sanders and Daly (2012) in their own study of reflections by Level 4 students on their foundation year experiences refer in similar vein to the related term *cognitive dissonance* ('once committed to an alternative, people prefer supportive (consonant) information compared with opposing (dissonant) information' (Jonas *et al.*, 2001). Sanders and Daly (2012) suggest that 'those who invest their time completing the course are likely to justify this investment after the event. It would therefore be surprising if participants ... did not present a constructive account of their experiences on the FY.' Students choosing to participate have clearly been motivated by their positive experiences to share their reflections on those experiences, and the snowballing technique involved in selecting the sample unsurprisingly did not reach any students with less than positive experiences of the place of foundation year in their own transitions from secondary to tertiary education. Sanders and Daly (*ibid*) note the degree of consensus in the positive reflections in their study despite the fact that students come from four different institutions, however, and a similar consensus can be noted here, given that the student sample was drawn from three different faculties and two separate year groups.

A significant area which has received focus in literature in relation to easing anxiety and mental health concerns among new students is the importance of friends. Friendship as an issue was analysed by Buote *et al.* (2007) from a number of angles, focusing on this during a time of 'adjustment' among first year university students, and perhaps unsurprisingly noting the positive impacts in general of new friendships in the adjustment process. New friendships are characterised in the study by Budde *et al.* (*ibid*) as enhancing a sense of belonging to the new institution, as being of practical assistance, reducing stress and increasing the 'fun', normalising problems and providing sympathetic support. Notable measures in the study are of individuals' openness to new friendships and of both the quantity and quality of new friendships as variable factors. Reflecting on foundation year, students in our study show awareness of similar issues, for example: 'I feel like if you can make a ... good network of friends ... it's a good way to go about combating that ... initial homesickness at the start of the year' (Participant 2). While acknowledging the range of formal mental health support services offered by the university, the same student notes 'it might be better just to reach out to a friend'. This is where from a mental health perspective, foundation year may have an advantage over direct entry to first year: 'I feel like during foundation year, it's a good opportunity to make closer friends than you would when going into university ... into first year straightaway ... because it's a smaller group of people, you know it's maybe 100 tops ... in a lecture ... whereas if you went straight into first year, some of your lectures could have 300 people in and that's daunting ...' (Participant 1). The size of the cohort seems to be significant from a 'friendliness' angle. The chance to make close personal connections not only with other students but also with teaching staff at Foundation level is

appreciated and is contrasted with the first year where ‘lecturers and tutors are not as friendly’ (Participant 1) – not intended as a criticism of character, but through restrictions in circumstance: ‘[Year 1] is a bigger environment with a lot more people so it’s a lot harder to form that personal connection’ (Participant 1).

In a university study context, a further dimension is inherent here. The opportunity to form close connections with both course mates and teaching staff does not only contribute to a social and support network with its potential benefits for mental health, but forms an early sense of belonging to a community of learners. This is another potential strength of foundation year because of its reduced size in comparison to direct entry at first year level. To what extent does this early membership of a community of learners benefit students in the short term (FY) or longer term (Years 1 to graduation)? Anthony-Okeke (2020, p.62) draws on Reeve (2002) in referring to these senses of ‘belonging and connections with significant others (e.g. teachers and peers in the classroom)’ as *relatedness*. When these relationships are perceived as positive – as they clearly are in this instance, e.g., ‘I got to know quite a few lecturers and ... at the end of the Foundation, we had like a fun little game about ... match this thing to the lecturer’ (Participant 3); ‘with my foundation year ... I had a good personal connection with my tutors’ (Participant 1) – the environment becomes a supportive one for motivation for, and engagement in, independent learning. Anthony-Okeke (2020, p.65) further notes that such environments also tend to promote learning for understanding (as opposed to simply learning to pass exams), engagement of learners and opportunities to build skills and independent learning abilities into the assessment of understanding.

The foundation year cohorts in this research, as is the case in many similar provisions in the sector (see Figure 1), are characterised by the significant diversity of student. Briggs *et al.* (2012) note the particular degree of social displacement that such students experience when starting at university, and among their recommendations note that adjustment can be enhanced by opportunities to form positive social contacts with other students and staff; they also suggest improved staff/student ratios in the first year at university to help support such students. It is notable that these are both areas highlighted by students in our study as contributing to their positive experiences at Foundation level:

‘Foundation year is a good opportunity to make closer friends than you would when going into University into first year straight away’ (Participant 1).

‘a lot more close-knit yes ... you have a small cohort sample, mine was 60 people’ (Participant 3)

‘you can form those close friendships and bonds in the foundation year just through its smaller size and its friendly nature’ (Participant 1)

‘[FY] does settle you a bit more, it does settle you when you’re going into the first [year] because yeah you do have that group of friends’ (Participant 1).

The fact that teaching staff are able to get to know students by name adds to the ‘friendly environment’, contrary to student expectations and contrary to experiences in first year: ‘I was surprised when they did know my name’ (Participant 3); ‘you don’t get that [name recognition] in first year ... [FY] was a nice friendly environment to be in’ (Participant 1). These personal connections combine to help students overcome initial feelings of ‘scariness’ (Participant 1). It is also apparent from the data that this positive, friendly environment does not just happen, even if numbers are relatively lower than at higher levels, but is created by staff: ‘its friendly nature ... all stems really from the teaching downwards ... if they’re in a friendly environment, students are going to tend to be more friendly’ (Participant 1). While the teaching programme is rigorous and at times stressful, elements of ‘fun’ (Participant 3), introduced by teaching teams, are also noted as contributing to a positive teaching and learning environment. The positive

impacts of friendships formed at Foundation level are not limited to that single year, but are also seen in a positive light when it comes to coping mentally with studying at first year: 'I was not as lonely as I would be if I just started first year from the get-go' (Participant 5).

Foundation students see this year as one which reduces the gap between secondary and tertiary education, which brings increased confidence and ability to cope:

'[FY] gives you a level of confidence from lecture one of first year, whereas first year students going from school [experience] a bigger transition, I think' (Participant 2)

Again, this does not just happen: students note that Foundation lecturers are not only trying to teach their academic subjects, but are also 'trying to get us to build confidence and to ...aim higher' (Participant 4). Such comments around the importance of the development of student confidence in the very early stages of university chime well in answer to the findings of Leese (2010), who notes that if high stress levels are allowed to develop in students at this initial point in their learning journey, low confidence is a likely outcome.

Certainly, foundation year students report a degree of uncertainty, unease and confusion at the start of their academic programmes. There are inevitably significant differences in approach between study in sixth form and study at university, and the particularly increased emphasis on independent learning at university is duly noted in the data: 'a lot less spoon feeding than sixth form' (Participant 3). Without exception, the students participating in these semi-structured interviews see the foundation year as a welcome opportunity to familiarise themselves with approaches to teaching and learning at university, to relevant subject content, to relevant academic skills, to university systems and services, and more:

'It was definitely a good time to actually get ... familiar with these services' (Participant 1)

'I remember how confusing SurreyLearn [the VLE] was at the start' (Participant 1)

'If I didn't do the Foundation Year, I probably would have taken ... a while to figure out a way I can use this' (Participant 3)

There is no suggestion that these are not emotions experienced by students entering first Year directly, but for any students with a history of anxiety, the period of extended and supported transition offered by a foundation year would appear to be a positive initiative.

Implications

Perhaps this kind of foundation year provision, which has become popular in many UK HEIs and was introduced by the current institution in 2018, and which has been analysed in this study, is an actual example of a university fulfilling the need identified by Leese (2010) for institutions to adapt in order to support new students, rather than just waiting for students to become independent.

The students who designed and ran the semi-structured interview process and produced the set of podcasts are clear examples of those argued for by Tight (2019, p.9), identifying the need for 'not just the willingness of students to have their whole lives researched, but also their direct involvement – as those with the easiest access and greatest understanding – as researchers'; and by Maunder *et al.* (2013), who 'advise that it is crucial to involve students in research on transitions in order to provide more authentic access to students' voices'.

The open discussion of mental health and those same feelings of uncertainty, unease and confusion mentioned above and expressed in the semi-structured interviews have translated into key points in the edited podcasts that the students produced and released on the university Panopto server, which have since been shared by programme teaching teams with subsequent incoming Foundation students and with staff. As such, this may be seen as a step towards addressing a main action suggested by Gravett (2019), who recommends that through programme documentation, at the induction stage and in the taught programme that 'institutions might wish to articulate ... the discomfort that may ensue as learning progresses.' The podcasts

also 'include a discussion of the normality of such discomfort' that aligns well with a further need identified by Gravett (ibid) to promote this as a theme. A particular point in the student discussion is the way they draw listeners' (i.e., other students') attention to the fact that 'transition is supported throughout the university experience as opposed to at particular points in time' Gravett (ibid):

I felt like [there is] more supporting through systems like this, I know, for some people ... going to the gym helps both physical and mental health ... as it gives them time away from studies and [is] a good thing (Participant 5)

There are numerous resources, both inside and outside of the university (Participant 3)

And the discussion as a whole is peppered with references to ongoing academic, practical and emotional support functions available such as a peer-assisted writing programme, Centre for Wellbeing, extenuating circumstances support, academic skills and development – both general services and specialised support, for example for female students, also a nearby safe haven and NHS talking services.

In a minor way, this project allowed 'opportunities for students to reflect upon what they bring to the higher education environment and how these skills might be useful or might need to adapt as learning happens' (Gravett, 2019): this is far from the ideal scenario of involving all students in such reflection on and application of previous experiences and skills, but can still be seen as a valuable starting point. The exercise was essentially retrospective – devised at a point when some of the participants were still foundation year students themselves, but with the interviews conducted at later stages, once participants had the perspective and distance to reflect on the foundation year experience and contrast it with experiences at first year level, rather than any intended focus on 'how foundation year is going'. Similar exercises which take a more longitudinal approach would be valuable as future research initiatives to add depth and variety to this kind of body of real-life, diverse student experience for analysis.

Through the sharing of the podcast discussions by staff, the student voice has become a small part of the transition pedagogy within the institution as students reflect on their own unique experiences: such examples could certainly be used as stimulus for personal reflection and similar discussion with other student groups. As a student-staff partnership project, this was also a way for 'staff to create opportunities for students to share their individual experiences of learning and of higher education' (Gravett, 2019). Of course, the podcasts were a vehicle not only for students to share their experiences with other students, but also with staff, hence enabling greater understanding by staff of 'the diversity of students' lives ... enabling conversations surrounding a more nuanced understanding of transition as becoming, and potentially of transitions as troublesome, to emerge' (ibid).

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