



Sowing the seeds of student success: the power of learning development in foundation year programmes

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Presentation abstract

Like watching seeds germinate, grow and flourish we advocate for an approach to learning development that cultivates confidence, motivation and success as a long-term endeavour in line with Ileris's three dimensions of learning (2002). This presentation demonstrated the sustained and long-term impact of holistic learning development approaches on Level 6 learners who study integrated foundation years.

Against a changing backdrop of challenges which have questioned the funding, status and prestige of Year 0/Level 3 work within our HE institutions we presented evidence of impact and explored the pedagogy that creates meaningful long-term improvements in academic attainment across the multi-discipline Level 3 that involves collaboration across institutions.

Following this interdisciplinary approach, we compared data for Level 6 learners who did and did not take a foundation year. In 23/24 those Level 6 students who completed a foundation year frequently outperformed their contemporaries without a foundation year including having higher pass rates and lower rates of resubmission and retakes. This impact is even more acute for Level 6 Black learners whose pass rate was 7% higher and

their reassessment rate was 5% lower than their contemporaries without a foundation year.

Linking data with practice we showed cross-disciplinary pedagogies have nurtured these learners to create these long-term gains. We were excited to share a range of examples that transcend disciplinary boundaries and show holistic approaches to learning that have supported not just academic development but embrace the whole learner. We also bring with us first-hand experience with the perspectives of a foundation year student turned member of staff.

Keywords: foundation year; learning development; holistic pedagogy; interdisciplinary approaches; student attainment.

Community response

The community really enjoyed such a positive and thought-provoking exploration of foundation years as a space for effective learning development. The change of perspective to view learning gains at Level 6, not Level 4, was both refreshing and particularly valuable in a sector that is so driven by metrics.

The seed analogy was perfect to capture the dual roles of foundation year and learning development staff of facilitating the right conditions for learning but also providing the care and nurture needed for success. It also reflects some of the challenges that foundation year practitioners can experience, because we do not always get to see or take credit for the 'final picture' at the end of the learning journey. As such, it was so incredibly motivating to hear John's story to demonstrate the value of the foundation year pathway and the importance of learning development within this.

For one of the delegates, this presentation prompted some consideration of how we ought to measure the 'success' of foundation years. Quantifying success via metrics seems restrictive as it does not capture all the functions of the foundation year. For example, as mentioned in the talk, one function of the foundation year is to give some students the opportunity to try HE and then decide that it's not for them – arguably, a student deciding from their experience that they do not want to continue in HE can be both the right thing for

the student and a 'failure' from the perspective of metrics. Perhaps the best way to assess the success of a foundation year programme should primarily be qualitative – I think John's account of his own experience speaks to this. To this end, this presentation really affirmed to me the importance of listening to the voices of our foundation year students. As a demographic/cohort that still feels relatively new in HE, we need to understand how these students view themselves, identify themselves as learners and understand their own unique experiences. Thank you in particular to John for sharing your story – it really was refreshing and uplifting to hear your perspective on the value of your foundation year.

Next steps and additional questions

Assessing the outcomes of our Level 6 graduates who are foundation year 'alumni' is something one of them has wanted to do in their own institution for a while, and seeing the data presented here reinforced this. What areas should be considered when establishing the assessment of these outcomes? What helped you define outcomes and identify the best strategies to measure them?

Authors' reflection

It was important when we were developing this work that the methods of measurement were those that could be understood by senior leadership. There are many debates about the use of data, especially following the introduction of the student outcomes measures, and we want the use of our data to bridge that debate. It is difficult to use the student outcome measures in short term research as the lag on the release of this data makes that difficult. The use of reassessment, non-submission and average mark gap were all chosen to serve as proxies for one or more of the student outcome measures, but also as things that learning developers are interested in. There are other measures such as attendance and engagement monitoring but they do not necessarily have a direct link to both student outcomes measures and the work of learning development.

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Bhupan Haria is a Principal Lecturer in foundation year in the Guildhall School of Business and Law at London Metropolitan University and is committed to creating inclusive, student-centred learning environments. He integrates coaching and facilitation into teaching, encouraging self-awareness, agency and academic growth. His approach challenges traditional perceptions of higher education, promoting experiential and lifelong learning. Bhupan believes diversity should be celebrated and openly discussed, fostering safe spaces where students feel empowered to share ideas and experiences. He works with

students to co-create meaningful learning communities, guided by the belief that learning thrives when everyone takes responsibility.

John Clay is a former student of London Metropolitan University, graduating with a First Class degree in Event Management. As a student, he was a Student Representative, Peer Mentor, PASS Coach and co-created extracurricular schemes for the students. John has spoken at numerous conferences as a student voice and is now working as an Employment Engagement Support Assistant at London Metropolitan University aiding current students with work placement assignments and creating new relationships with employers both in the UK and internationally. John dedicates himself to the experience and development of the student body.

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