

## FYNAC Summary

### Small group discussion: Identifying 3 key challenges to Foundation Year provision post-2012

The three main topics that were identified in our group discussion were “Transparency”, “Transferability” and “Widening Participation”. It was agreed that these topics cover most of the issues the Foundation Year Sector will be facing in the future.

**Transparency:** The higher fees will mean higher expectations from the students; the students will become “customers”. Before applying they want to know what deal they are getting for their fees. “Will I be taught at the University campus or at an FE College associated with the University?”, “What will the advantages/disadvantages be for in house/college provision?” The students will also compare the different pass and progression grades at different institutions, which can vary widely between Foundation Years (between 40 and 60%).

There is a large diversity of provision within the Foundation Year sector and it was agreed that there needs to be transparency within the university documentation and in the admissions process to make sure the students feel that their expectations into the Foundation Year are met.

**Transferability:** This discussion topic focussed on the question what the end product of the Foundation Year should be. Is it an integrated part of a degree programme or a free-standing year with the possibility to transfer to other HE institutions? What can the students do with their Foundation Year credits if they pass but not progress? Contextual data on this are very important for the admissions process and there should be a common formula to transfer Foundation Year results into A-level grades or UCAS points.

**Widening participation:** This topic was seen as a big problem in the context of university fees. In the current climate it is important for the institution to show “Widening Participation” as in allowing students from non-traditional backgrounds to access Higher Education. In light of the increased fees, universities (especially the ones who are taking the maximum fee) have to show to accept a proportion of “Widening Participation” students and offer bursaries for these groups. We as a group asked the question, how do we identify “Widening Participation” students and how are these admissions data used. Are we just looking for alternative qualifications or qualifications from underperforming schools (UCAS data), or is income, postcode (“working class” areas) or age just as valid? To identify “Widening Participation” students is important for recruitment, but also for retention, i.e. keeping those students on for the Honours stage of their degree or even further. In our discussion group some universities went as far as only allowing “Widening Participation” students into the Foundation Year. Time will tell how the changes in admissions policy will influence learning, teaching and performance of the new cohorts.

Generally the group agreed that the outcome of the increased tuition fees from 2012 is unknown and that we can only start to fully assess the situation once the data on applicant numbers become available early next year.