

Key challenges for Foundation Year programmes

- as identified by the green group, facilitated by Annette Daly

A number of key issues were identified with many of these interconnected. However, these can be summarised into three main areas:

1. Recruitment and diversity
2. Delivery and expectations
3. Profile and status of foundation year within HEI and wider context



Figure 1: representation of areas addressed by Green Group

Recruitment and diversity

It is clear that there are substantial methodological variations across our various programmes with regard to recruitment. Methods include reliance on UCAS points, interviews, screening tasks ...and

taking a gamble. It has been difficult to identify clear recruitment strategies at times in an attempt to find students who would benefit from a foundation year and who would not waste the opportunity. There is a pressure to recruit from a Wider Access population, but the understanding of what “wider access” means must be maintained to reflect those who would not normally have the opportunity but who do have the potential. Targeting this potential seems to be a challenge. In addition, some of us have found our courses used as a way to fill the gaps for other courses which have under-recruited; however, this is not a helpful recruitment strategy for foundation year courses and links with the third key area identified below.

The diversity of the students we recruit is reflected in variations in age, academic experience, residential status (ie home or international), and cultural understanding of HEIs. This results in a huge challenge for delivery and the differentiation required (links to next key area).

Delivery and expectations

There were a number of different modes of delivery including full time (1 year), part time (2 years) and options of day/evening/weekend formats. There also appear to be substantial variations in levels of contact time across the various foundations. Flexibility and the expectation of this appears to be important.

Additionally, expectations link directly, especially in the current climate, to a sense of value for money and this seems to be connected with student engagement and levels of attrition and failure. Student expectations may not be entirely realistic and can often mismatch with the expectations of the staff in the HEI. Lack of coherence between these may be problematic.

Profile and status

Issues around negative perceptions of FY courses within HEIs also emerged. Far from being accorded the status they should be within a HEI, they are often very much undervalued. Perceptions conveyed included issues of uncertainty and sustainability of FY courses, concerns around fluctuations in HEI’s priorities and the impact of these on FY courses, lack of recognition for how FY courses often fulfil the requirements of HEIs to widen participation at this level of study. HEI restructuring demands do not always take FY programmes into account and the impact of dealing with changes coming down from this higher level can be very time consuming and resource heavy on FY year course which are already not well funded. Additionally negative and inferior views of staff who teach on foundation (and associated difficulties in finding staff who value the course and are prepared to teach on it) and foundation year graduates are not helping in raising the profile of these courses. There is a need for recognition and status.