

The Sussex Learning Network

**Foundation Degree Marketing &
Development**

Final Report

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Executive summary

The Sussex Learning Network (SLN) commissioned Papworth Research & Consultancy to undertake market research to assess the effectiveness of approaches to marketing Foundation degrees that have been used to date in Sussex, and explore other potentially effective means of doing so.

Over the past eighteen months, with the support of its partner universities and colleges, the SLN has been piloting a range of approaches to marketing Foundation degrees. Foundation degrees have been the main driver for curriculum development sponsored by the SLN and it has sought to establish a programme of cross-provider activity to promote new courses, and Foundation degrees in particular. This has been designed to complement the work undertaken by institutions. The approaches piloted by the SLN include the following:

- The development of a web-based one-stop-shop for potential learners, employers and advisors, providing information about applying for higher education provision in Sussex;
- Collaborating with The Sussex Council of Training Providers and Aim Higher to produce and maintain the Foundation Degrees in Sussex website which provides information to employers and potential students about Foundation degrees;
- Provision, on its website, of case-study examples of potential learners;
- The development and distribution of a range of leaflets promoting provision in specific curriculum areas;
- The development and distribution of a pack of leaflets about a range of issues of interest to potential learners in Sussex.
- Foundation degree symposia held regularly to bring practitioners together to discuss and address a range of issues relating to Foundation degrees, including marketing;
- The establishment of an SLN marketing group, a cross provider forum of marketing professionals from the HE and FE institutions in Sussex, to discuss the marketing and promotion of Foundation degrees;
- The Student Network: a website designed by students for students. Created with the support of the SLN and aimed at vocational students already studying in Sussex, or people considering taking a vocational course, it includes news and views from students, information about courses, and links to helpful websites;
- The Foundation degree Learner of the Year Award, supported by the SLN as part of the FE Sussex Spring Awards. It publicly recognises a Foundation degree learner for their achievements whilst raising the profile of Foundation degrees locally.

The research involved the following activities:

- A review of existing research reports;
- A workshop with representatives of five Sussex institutions providing Foundation degrees;
- 11 focus groups with a total of 82 individuals (current Foundation degree students, potential Foundation degree students in education, and potential Foundation degrees students with additional needs);
- Telephone consultations with eight employers (further information about which can be found in Appendix Two).

Papworth Research & Consultancy and the SLN is grateful to all those who generously gave their time to participate in this research.

Awareness

Awareness and understanding of Foundation degrees is low among all groups.

The word “Foundation” is often taken to imply that Foundation degrees are at a level significantly below level 4, and leads to an association with Arts Foundation courses.

Marketing & promotion

The vast majority of participants who were studying for Foundation degrees had found out about the existence of Foundation degrees, and their specific course, only after enquiring with their provider about other courses, or even starting other courses.

Few participants reported having used the services of an IAG agency or being assisted by anyone in their search for IAG. Most had relied on the internet, provider literature (such as prospectuses) and direct contact with providers to investigate available provision and reported that they had not been given information about Foundation degrees.

Because most potential students search for information by subject (rather than by course type), participants felt that information on Foundation degrees should be presented alongside information on other pathways within the same subject. This suggests that prospective students are likely to welcome the search function on the Foundation Degrees in Sussex website, which enables them to search a directory of provision by subject and/or qualification and/or location (though, of course, this website will only be visited by those who are at least open to the possibility of undertaking a Foundation degree).

Participants were keen to be able to access a single source of information about learning provision. The SLN’s Learning Opportunities website aims to be a one stop shop for information about higher education provision within Sussex. This is likely to be welcomed by

potential learners as a step towards what they want, i.e. a single source for information about **all** provision (at all levels and in all areas)¹.

All participants felt that personal contact with providers and students was useful in choosing a course.

Participants suggested that marketing materials needed punchy messages that would catch their eye and speak directly to their way of thinking.

Participants suggested that the key messages that would hook people's interest were the following:

- A Foundation degree can be a stepping stone to an Honours degree;
- Flexibility of study options (and the fact that 'full-time' may not mean five days per week of contact time, which means that the hours can be fitted around other commitments);
- The vocational nature of the training;
- Entry requirements;
- The duration of courses;
- Accreditation levels.

Attractive elements of the Foundation degree model

Most current students selected their Foundation degree because they were attracted by the subject, rather than the Foundation degree model. However, a smaller number had chosen a Foundation degree because of elements of the model, including the following:

- Work-based learning, which participants liked for the following reasons:
 - Improved employability;
 - The opportunity to experience a taster of the career they were considering entering;
 - Opportunities to network within their target industry (particularly students who had chosen a local provider and were likely to remain in the same area after graduating, e.g. older students with work and family commitments, and students in industries, such as music, where success depends on networking);
 - A preference for 'learning through doing';
 - The opportunity to study without losing touch with the workplace (particularly older students in employment);
- Flexibility of learning hours (part-time provision and the ability to complete coursework in work time – particularly older students with family and employment commitments);
- The opportunity to earn while learning (and learn while earning);

¹ While, on the face of it, it may seem disappointing that none of the focus group participants reported having used the website, at the time of the focus groups the website had been only recently launched.

- Employer involvement ensuring that courses are relevant to the workplace;
- That it leads to a high level qualification;
- Flexible entry requirements (particularly for older potential students);
- Lower entry requirements than for an Honours degree (particularly for those level three students who were concerned they might not achieve the grades they required for an Honours degree);
- The staged approach, for the following reasons:
 - A shorter-term commitment (particularly students taking a career break);
 - Concern that they were not academically capable of achieving an Honours degree, or didn't have the appropriate ICT or study skills;
 - Having a qualification to demonstrate ability to employers immediately on completing an Honours degree course, rather than having to wait for the result of the Honours degree (mentioned by a level three student);
 - The opportunity to do the top-up year in a different location (mentioned by a level three student);
- Studying with people of a similar age (particularly older students);
- The availability of financial support;
- Provision of additional study support.

Factors that participants disliked about Foundation degrees

Concerns that put potential students off taking the Foundation degree pathway included the following:

- Being committed to achieving an Honours degree – some learners felt that, as they were certain that they were going to study to Honours degree level, there was no benefit to them in taking a staged approach. While they recognised that they could progress to Honours level if they gained a Foundation degree, they were not motivated to explore this new option;
- Concern that a Foundation degree would have a lower status than an Honours degree in the labour market (particularly level three students);
- Associating Foundation degrees with vocational learning (particularly younger participants);
- Potential disruption in progression to a top-up course (particularly level three students);

- Concern that funding would not be provided for a top-up course;
- Perceived barriers to participation in learning (e.g. changes in learning styles since the potential learner was last in learning);
- Lack of employer support and insecurity of employment (particularly the low paid).

Parity between partner colleges and universities

Whether or not Foundation degree students at partner colleges felt ‘part of’ the universities that accredited their Foundation degrees depended on the extent to which they used the facilities of that university which, in turn, often depended upon how close to the university they lived.

Some partner colleges, such as Plumpton Agricultural College and BIMM, have a strong identity of their own and students at these colleges felt they had “*the best of both worlds*”.

With one exception, Instrumental & Vocal Tuition Foundation degree students at Chichester university told us that they would have been just as happy to study at a partner college.

Conversely, Social Care Foundation degree students at the University of Chichester felt that the quality of teaching would be higher at a university than a college.

Most level three students regarded a college course as less prestigious than a university course, perceiving a natural progression from school, through college, to university.

Similarly, some older participants who were not Foundation degree students were concerned that the quality of provision would be lower at a partner college.

Others were concerned as to how employers would value a course delivered at an FE college by comparison to one delivered at a university.

Where participants had a preference for a partner college, this was usually a reflection of their desire to study locally.

However, community and voluntary group participants suggested that their clients/beneficiaries might be intimidated by the idea of attending a university and would find a college more approachable.

As a result of seeing college provision as of lower status than university provision, some level three students felt that fees at a partner college should be lower than those at a university, though this view was not universal. Others felt that, so long as the facilities and the teaching quality were comparable, the fees could be comparable too. Older participants generally felt that fees should be the same at universities and partner colleges, so long as the quality of provision was the same.

Employers' views

The eight employers interviewed for this research were of the view that most employers were unaware of Foundation degrees. (Two of those consulted were supporting employees to undertake Foundation degrees and four were discussing with Chichester College the potential to provide placements for Foundation degree students. They were selected through routes which would tend to lead to employers who recognise the benefits of providing/supporting training for their employees. Thus the fact that all but one of them had a good understanding of the Foundation degree model is not an indication that this is typical of employers in general).

Consulted employers reported that Foundation degrees meet employers' needs more effectively than do Honours degrees. The aspects of the Foundation degree model which appealed to consulted employers were the following:

- Employer involvement in curriculum development;
- Local provision;
- The variety of learning methods, including methods which are not provider-based;
- The shorter duration of Foundation degrees by comparison to Honours degrees.

Barriers to supporting staff to undertake Foundation degrees included the following:

- Rapid staff turnover;
- Being unable to afford to release staff for training (particularly micro businesses).

They did not regard courses delivered by partner colleges as being of a lower status than those delivered by universities.

They reported that the most effective way to involve employers in Foundation degrees (whether in curriculum development, providing work placements or supporting employees to undertake them) was through direct contact with a provider leading to the development of an ongoing relationship. 'Scattergun' marketing methods such as mailshots and emails shots were routinely ignored.

They suggested that the key information that employers wanted was the cost of a course, the amount of working time an employee would be required to devote to the course, and the course content.

Recommendations

There is much to be done to raise awareness of Foundation degrees and what they offer.

Marketing needs to be undertaken on two levels: first, raising awareness of what a Foundation degree **is** (complementing and building on national activities such as those undertaken by Foundation degree Forward) and, second, promoting individual providers/courses. While it may be most appropriate for providers to take responsibility for marketing their own provision, there is scope for providers to collaborate on the former.

In developing promotional activities to raise awareness of the Foundation degree model, providers will need to consider the extent to which the Foundation degree offer in Sussex reflects the picture of Foundation degrees that is presented nationally.

There is no benefit in listing Foundation degrees together in a discrete section within a prospectus (unless this is in **addition** to presenting them by subject).

Marketing messages that will ‘hook’ potential students vary by type of potential student. One size does not fit all. Providers need to segment their target markets, consider the views and needs of each segment and design marketing approaches and materials appropriate to each.

Marketing materials designed to be looked at briefly (e.g. posters as opposed to prospectuses) will be more effective if they use punchy messages to appeal to specific segments of the market. Since most people don’t know what Foundation degrees are, the ‘hook’ has to be what a segment of the target market might be looking for and the ‘punchline’ the fact that a Foundation degree can provide this.

Participants suggested that the key messages to include in infotisements, websites and printed literature designed to be taken away and read at leisure were the following:

- A Foundation degree can be a stepping stone to an Honours degree;
- The flexibility of the study options (and the fact that ‘full-time’ may not mean five days per week of contact time, which means that the hours can be fitted around other commitments);
- The vocational nature of the training;
- The entry requirements;
- The duration of the course;
- The level of accreditation.

All Sussex providers should ensure that their websites and prospectuses contain a brief introduction to Foundation degrees, including success stories of students who are studying for Foundation degrees or who have gone on to gain an Honours degree or promotion at work.

The most effective way to disseminate information about learning opportunities is through personal contact. This suggests that there would be benefit in Sussex providers building, and collaborating, on their existing activities to promote Foundation degrees through personal contact with potential learners at level 3 providers, Adult & Community Education providers, community groups and public places. Our research suggested that potential learners are

particularly responsive to visits (ideally involving current or past Foundation degree students) and to taster days linked to Foundation degree provision.

A less resource-intensive way to enable potential learners to engage with current and past learners is, as suggested by the HEIST report, to develop chat forums for this purpose.

DVD resources also offer a cost-effective way to enable potential learners to hear from current and past Foundation degree students. Foundation degree Forward produces a range of free DVDs for use by schools and colleges.

It's also vital to ensure that those advising potential learners (classroom teachers, careers teachers, careers advisors, parents, university admissions staff etc) understand what Foundation degrees are and what they offer.

Such contact should highlight the aspects of Foundation degrees which participants found attractive and address the concerns that put potential students off Foundation degrees (see above). Marketing should also address concerns that provision at partner colleges would be of a lower quality or status than provision at universities, being careful not to engender the view by seeming to 'protest too much'. Providers might consider how marketing might promote the views of those employers who hold in high esteem Foundation degrees delivered at partner colleges.

As with potential learners, the most effective way to encourage employers to get involved in Foundation degrees is through personal contact. Liaison with employers should stress the following aspects of Foundation degrees:

- Employer involvement in curriculum development;
- Local provision;
- The variety of learning methods, including methods which are not provider-based;
- The shorter duration of Foundation degrees by comparison to Honours degrees.

It should also address the following barriers to supporting staff to undertake Foundation degrees:

- Rapid staff turnover;
- Being unable to afford to release staff for training (particularly micro businesses).

Initial contact should provide the following key information:

- The cost of provision;
- The amount of working time an employee would be required to devote to the course

- The course content.

Table I summarises our recommendations for providers, for the SLN and for the SLN to progress with other stakeholders, indicating which of these stakeholders is likely to be key in implementing each one.

Table I: Recommended actions for key stakeholders

Responsibility	Direct action		Action for the SLN to progress with partners	
	Sussex Fd providers	The SLN	Fdf	Other IAG providers ²
Action				
Address specific segments of target markets with all materials and activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Continue developing & distributing materials introducing the Fd concept and its advantages (and addressing the perceptions that put people off Fds)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Consider the extent to which the Sussex offer matches the national Fd model and ensure that marketing materials present an accurate picture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Promote the Foundation Degrees in Sussex website, and its search function	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Promote the Learning Opportunities website and its search function	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure websites and prospectuses contain a brief introduction to Fds and success stories of Fd students	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Provide a single source of information about learning provision		<input type="checkbox"/>		
Develop and build on ways (visits, chat rooms, DVDs) to enable potential Fd students to hear directly from past and present Fd students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Provide taster days linked to Fds	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Ensure that those advising potential Fd students understand the Fd concept	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Raise employer awareness of the Fd model and its benefits (and address perceived barriers in marketing materials)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

² E.g. Connexions, Nextstep.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Sussex Learning Network (SLN) commissioned Papworth Research & Consultancy to undertake market research to assess the effectiveness of approaches to marketing Foundation degrees that have been used to date in Sussex, and explore other potentially effective means of doing so.

To date, providers have marketed Foundation degree courses alongside traditional degrees and other courses with little co-ordination of Foundation degree marketing across providers, although the University of Brighton has produced and distributed posters and leaflets produced to promote Foundation degrees delivered by both itself and its partner colleges. The University of Brighton website has a section explaining the concept of Foundation degrees.

Over the past eighteen months, with the support of its partner universities and colleges, the SLN has been piloting a range of approaches to marketing Foundation degrees. Foundation degrees have been the main driver for curriculum development sponsored by the SLN and it has sought to establish a programme of cross-provider activity to promote new courses, and Foundation degrees in particular. This has been designed to complement the work undertaken by institutions. The approaches piloted by the SLN include the following:

- The development of a web-based one-stop-shop for potential learners, employers and advisors, providing information about applying for higher education provision (the Learning Opportunities section of its website), which includes an ‘ask an adviser’ search function enabling users to type in a question to be directed to appropriate information on the site;
- Collaborating with The Sussex Council of Training Providers and Aim Higher to produce and maintain the Foundation Degrees in Sussex website which provides information to employers and potential students about Foundation degrees, introducing the concept and providing a search function which enables the user to search for courses by subject, location, qualification or keyword;
- Provision, on its website, of case-study examples of potential learners to provide guidance to potential learners as to learning pathways that might be appropriate for them;
- The development and distribution of a range of leaflets promoting provision in specific curriculum areas;
- The development and distribution of a pack of leaflets about learning opportunities in Sussex addressing practical issues such as financial assistance, disability support, childcare, finding time to study and choosing courses and providers;
- Foundation degree symposia held regularly to bring practitioners together to discuss and address a range of issues relating to Foundation degrees, including marketing;

- The establishment of an SLN marketing group, a cross provider forum of marketing professionals from the HE and FE institutions in Sussex, to discuss the marketing and promotion of Foundation degrees;
- The Student Network: a website designed by students for students. Created with the support of the SLN and aimed at vocational students already studying in Sussex, or people considering taking a vocational course, it includes news and views from students, information about courses, and links to helpful websites;
- The Foundation degree Learner of the Year Award, supported by the SLN as part of the FE Sussex Spring Awards. It publicly recognises a Foundation degree learner for their achievements whilst raising the profile of Foundation degrees locally.

This research, undertaken among a variety of population groups across Sussex, aimed to investigate views and perceptions of Foundation degrees, including the following:

- Levels of awareness of Foundation degrees and of marketing that has been undertaken, and the effectiveness of marketing methods;
- The main factors that influence students to apply to study a Foundation degree;
- The differences, if any, that are reported by current Foundation degree students between their expectations and experience of Foundation degrees³;
- Students' views on studying at a partner college compared to a university, and issues of student and institutional identity.

The research involved the following activities:

- A review of existing research reports;
- A workshop with representatives of five Sussex institutions providing Foundation degrees;
- 11 focus groups with a total of 82 individuals, as follows:
 - Current Foundation degree students:
 - Six Foundation degree students in the first year of a full-time Countryside Management Foundation degree at Plumpton College;
 - Ten Foundation degree students in the second year of an Instrumental & Vocal Tuition Foundation degree at Chichester College;

³ We were unable to investigate this issue as so few of the participants had started their Foundation degree with an understanding of Foundation degrees and how they compare to Honours degrees (see section 5).

- Ten Foundation degree students in the second year of a Professional Musicianship Foundation degree at the Brighton Institute of Modern Music (BIMM);
- Current Foundation degree students in related employment:
 - Four Foundation degree students in the first year of a Social Care Foundation Degree at the University of Chichester;
- Potential Foundation degree in education:
 - Two level three students at Collyer's College;
 - Nine level three students at Collyer's College;
 - Six level three students at Bexhill College;
 - Three level three students at Bexhill College;
- Potential Foundation degree students with additional needs⁴ (or people representing their interests):
 - Seven clients of the Horizons Community Learning Project in Hastings;
 - Thirteen clients of the Working Together Project⁵ in Brighton;
 - Twelve clients of the Working Together Project⁵ in Brighton.
- Telephone consultations with eight employers, of which two were supporting employees to undertake Foundation degrees and four were discussing with Chichester College the potential to provide placements for Foundation degree students. All were selected through routes which would tend to lead to employers who recognise the benefits of providing/supporting training for their employees.

A more detailed description of research participants is given in Appendix Two.

We were unable to convene a focus group specifically consisting of potential Foundation degree students in employment, although some members of the above groups were in this category.

Papworth Research & Consultancy and the SLN is grateful to all those who generously gave their time to participate in this research.

The topic guides which were used to structure these discussions can be found in Appendix One of this report. Their design was influenced by *Good Practice in the Marketing of*

⁴ Including people with needs relating to mental health, learning disabilities, substance misuse, being refugees or asylum seekers, homelessness and abuse.

⁵ These participants all worked for, or were members of, community/voluntary groups. Some were interested in Foundation degrees for their own development, some for their employees, some for their clients and some for more than one of these. Two were currently studying Foundation degrees and one had recently applied to study one.

Foundation degrees: A research-based guide for practitioners; HEIST & Foundation degree Forward 2006.

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 summarises the relevant information from two research reports;
- Section 3 summarises the discussion at the provider workshop;
- Section 4 looks at levels of awareness of Foundation degrees and of some of the marketing that providers have undertaken, and considers which marketing methods have been effective in attracting people to Foundation degrees;
- Section 5 examines the routes that Foundation degree students had followed to identify and access their courses;
- Section 6 considers the main factors that influence people to choose, or reject, the Foundation degree route;
- Section 7 reports students' views on studying at a partner college by comparison to studying at a university.
- Section 8 reports the views of consulted employers;
- Section 9 makes recommendations for marketing Foundation degrees across Sussex.

2 DESK RESEARCH

This section draws out the relevant points from the following reports:

- Good Practice in the Marketing of Foundation degrees: A research-based guide for practitioners; HEIST & Foundation degree Forward 2006;
- Foundation Degree Research Report; Bournemouth University November 2005.

The HEIST research identified three Foundation degree products, each of which maps roughly to a market sector, as follows:

- Full-time courses which tend to be based in FE colleges and marketed to level three students. The challenge here is to widen the reach.
- Part-time courses in generic subjects, such as Business or IT. These are applicable to a wide range of individuals and companies so developing a marketing strategy can be challenging.
- Part-time courses in niche areas. These tend to be developed with employer engagement which facilitates recruitment. The challenge is to avoid relying on a small number of employers to fill places.

Table 2.1 summarises the recommendations of the HEIST report with regard to the key messages to convey to the three market sectors⁶.

⁶ This summary should not be used as a substitute for the original report which goes into more detail.

Table 2.1: Key marketing messages

Message	Young full-time	Part-time	Employers
Academic study balanced with practical, work-based learning	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Natural progression from level three	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Keeps H ^{onours} degree option open	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Opportunity to develop relationships with employers	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Opportunity to 'earn and learn'	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Aimed at students from non-traditional or disadvantaged backgrounds	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Availability of bursaries/financial support with fees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Balance career development with gaining accreditation		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Flexible delivery balances work and life commitments		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Admission can be based on accreditation of prior experience/training		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Focus on training/skills rather than accreditation			<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunity to 'grow your own managers'			<input type="checkbox"/>
Fds produce a competitive, efficient workforce			<input type="checkbox"/>
Fds can improve employee retention			<input type="checkbox"/>

The HEIST research found that the following were effective in marketing to the three groups:

- Young full-time students:
 - Within colleges:
 - Internal mini HE fairs for students on level 3 courses;
 - Enhanced employability and progression routes;
 - Short talks to tutor groups;
 - Providing relevant and accessible information for Advice & Guidance tutors;
 - Ensuring Schools Liaison staff are promoting Foundation degrees;
 - Providing information for Connexions Advisers on the range of Foundation degree opportunities available;
 - Including a brief introduction to Foundation degrees on the institution's website. Including success stories of students who are studying for Foundation degrees or who have gone on to gain an Honours degree or promotion at work;
 - Providing a service whereby enquirers can email or chat to current students about Foundation degrees;
 - Using current students as 'ambassadors', for example, accompanying Schools Liaison staff visiting Year 13 students;

- Ensuring information on Foundation degrees can be found easily in the hard-copy prospectus.
- Within universities:
 - Ensuring all Foundation degree courses are listed on the fdf and UCAS websites;
 - Ensuring there is a link from the UCAS website directly to Foundation degree related pages on the institution's website;
 - Ensuring that all admissions staff are knowledgeable about Foundation degrees and able to discuss the opportunities available to prospective students;
 - Checking that the undergraduate hard-copy and online prospectus has clear signposts to Foundation degree course information, including the main benefits of the degrees;
 - In a partnership or consortium, discussing the potential to develop a combined Foundation degree prospectus, listing all the Foundation degrees offered in the partnership.
 - In a partnership or consortium, discussing the potential to develop a specific Foundation degree website, which could be signposted in all communication material.
- Potential part-time students:
 - Display boards that can be taken to different venues;
 - Including information on Foundation degrees in general open evenings at the institution, and/or running specific open evenings for Foundation degrees;
 - Targeting relevant evening classes, offering Foundation degrees as a natural progression route;
 - Highlighting Foundation degree opportunities in course leaflets sent out, for example, with local free newspaper;
 - Sending leaflets to libraries and community centres;
 - Visiting community groups;
 - Setting up stalls in local shopping centres and other public places;
 - Requesting major local employers to display posters or other promotional materials.
- Employers:
 - Thorough initial groundwork (researching the marketplace and engaging with employers) prior to developing the Foundation degree;
 - Linking with Business Development Teams ensuring they have literature on Foundation degrees and can talk knowledgeably about courses to business contacts.
 - Advertisements/flyers in trade journals.

The HEIST report highlighted the following benefits of providers collaborating in the marketing of Foundation degrees:

- Pooling resources;
- Sharing good practice;
- Raising awareness of Foundation degrees in general;
- Agreeing on a diverse Foundation degree offer and reducing competition/duplication.

The HEIST report stressed that, while curriculum design may appear to be separate from promotional activity, the most effective Foundation degrees are those where marketing has been seen as part of the development process.

The Bournemouth study included the following among its findings:

- There is a need for greater understanding of the value and success of Foundation degrees from the students' perspective. Clear career paths for each Foundation degree route need to be identified and used to aid marketing (including programme information in prospectuses and by Careers Advisors);
- There is a general lack of awareness of Foundation degree programmes in the business community;
- Websites and prospectuses can be made more effective with the use of FE to HE case studies and charts showing progression.

3 PROVIDER WORKSHOP

The workshop in May 2007 was attended by the following:

- Susan Lightfoot, University of Brighton;
- Colin Whitaker, Chichester College;
- Karen Arnold, University of Chichester;
- Neal Edwards, City College;
- Liz Long, Northbrook College.

3.1 Target markets

Attendees categorised their target markets for Foundation degrees as the following:

- FE students who lack the confidence to apply for a full degree and/or don't want to commit for three years (often able students from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or lower-achieving schools).
- People in employment (particularly within the health & social care, education, manufacturing/engineering, public, and voluntary sectors);
- Mature students including returners and people looking to make a career change (especially those moving into a career where employers require experience);
- People without A level qualifications.

3.2 Marketing methods

Currently providers market Foundation degrees in the following ways:

- Inclusion in the general prospectus which is distributed to the following:
 - Schools nationally;
 - HE fairs;
 - Enquirers;
 - IAG centres;
 - International outlets (e.g. British Council);
 - Entertainment centres;
- Websites;
- School/subject/course brochures distributed at taster days and HE fairs and sent to the following:
 - Enquirers;
 - A mailing list based on UCAS' Pre-Applicant Data (that identifies students that have expressed interest in specific curriculum areas);
 - Schools/colleges;

- IAG providers;
- Relevant employers;
- IAG providers;
- The University of Brighton runs a local advertising campaign to widen participation (including through raising awareness of Foundation degrees provided by partner colleges) in May/June involving:
 - Radio ads;
 - Postcards;
 - Posters on bus-stops etc;
- The University of Brighton produces a guide to studying at partner colleges;
- University Centre Hastings markets University of Brighton Foundation degrees delivered by other providers and produce a guide containing information on all these Foundation degrees;
- Local newspaper inserts;
- Some providers have Account Managers to liaise with employers on their training needs;
- Internal HE progression and external HE fairs;
- Newsletter emailed to database of enquirers;
- Local newspaper advertisements (e.g. the University of Chichester advertises annually, focusing on Foundation Degrees and explaining their lower entry requirements);
- The University of Chichester directly emails all young people in a 100 mile radius who have expressed an interest in a subject using hotcourses.com;
- The University of Brighton was planning a more general open day for the local population for 2008, to focus on provision through partner colleges (recent open day have been aimed mainly at school leavers with attendees required to register in advance).

The workshop also discussed the need to raise awareness and understanding of Foundation degrees among those who influence young people in their progression choices, including IAG providers, school teaching staff and parents. Attendees were concerned that many schools regard Foundation degrees as a less prestigious route than an Honours degree and/or as being appropriate only for the less able.

3.3 Key messages for target markets

Attendees felt that the key messages to convey to specific groups were as follows:

- Level three students:

- Quality;
 - Work-based (providing both useful experience and an interesting learning environment);
 - Shorter & (therefore) cheaper than Honours degrees;
 - Opportunity to progress to an Honours degree;
 - Availability at local colleges;
 - Provision alongside university students;
 - Flexible learning options;
 - Broader range of subjects;
 - Wider range of experience available within courses, e.g. possibility of doing one year in one area and one in another so get experience in two areas (e.g. music business and music production).
- Widening participation groups:
 - Achievability;
 - Work-based (providing practical experience);
 - Gradual/supported re-entry to employment;
 - Staged approach to a full degree;
 - Delivery at local colleges (convenient and more likely to be studying with people of a similar age);
 - Designed for older students.
 - Employers:
 - Provide experienced/industry-savvy employees;
 - Quality/university standard;
 - Directly work-related;
 - Industry-led;
 - Flexible learning methods (which reduces the amount of time for which you have to release staff)⁷;
 - That they might consider both recruiting Foundation degree graduates and supporting their existing employees to gain a Foundation degree.

3.4 Potential improvements

Attendees stressed that liaison with employers requires considerable, sustained effort. While academic institutions can find it challenging, liaising with employers over curriculum development and placement provision facilitates the development of courses that meet the needs of industry, which leads to higher demand for provision. It was suggested that universities can learn from colleges, which often have more experience of working with employers and understand their vocational needs better.

⁷ Though without undermining the message that a Foundation degree requires commitment and a considerable amount of time.

Some providers suggested that their institutions needed to co-ordinate better their approaches to employers so that employers were not approached by more than one part of the same institution. Providers reported that there is little duplication between institutions as each institution targets employers in its own locality⁸.

Providers were concerned about the high number of agencies that market provision to young people and would support the development of a single point of information about Sussex provision. Young people's first port of call for information is often the website of a specific institution so these would need to direct visitors to the single point of information.

However, while providers informally refer applicants to each other when courses are over-subscribed, they would be concerned about redirecting potential learners to other institutions before they had investigated whether they could meet the potential learners' needs.

⁸ While it might be expected that there would be duplication in approaches to employers in localities where there is more than one provider, such as Chichester and Brighton, it may be that there is enough variation between the offer of providers within each locality to preclude this.

4 LEVELS OF AWARENESS AND EFFECTIVE MARKETING METHODS

4.1 Understanding of the Foundation degree concept

With a few exceptions (notably a small number of participants at Collyer's), most participants were unaware of Foundation degrees unless they knew someone who had done one, knew someone who was doing one, or were currently studying for one themselves. In addition, many current Foundation degree students had come across the option to study a Foundation degree only by chance when searching for courses in their subject of choice (see section 4.3). One student, echoing the feelings of many, told us, *"I don't think I know anyone who knows what one is"* and that it was a shame that awareness of the courses was so low.

Level three students who reported they **had** heard the term Foundation degree, when asked to explain what Foundation degrees were, described them in similar terms to Access or Arts Foundation courses. For example, an 18 year old at Collyer's described them as, *"A course to do if you don't have a subject to go into the main course. You do that first before you go into it"* while another described them as, *"Something you do to start you off. So if you want to do a course that requires Maths and you haven't done Maths before, you do a Foundation degree in Maths and it becomes the basic level but it's enough to get you by"*.

This seems to be due to the word "Foundation", which initially led all participants to assume that Foundation degrees were at a level significantly below level 4 and to associate them with Arts Foundation courses. The following selection of quotes from participants illustrate this:

"I thought it was a pre-degree, kind of getting you up to speed to be able to then do a degree".

"I think the name would put people off. So you look at that [a Brighton University poster] and it says 'Foundation degree' and you don't really want to go and visit the website".

"You kind of dismiss it because you don't want to make the path even longer, so you're like 'Well, no, I don't want to spend ages doing it, I want to just get on there straight away and achieve'".

*"It makes it sounds like it's something you do before a degree. It doesn't make it sound like something that you do that could **become** your degree"*.

"I thought it was something to do with basic skills".

"I had never heard of a Foundation degree but, normally, my immediate association was a foundation course which is a year long course that you do before going on to a graphic design or fine art course. So I think it could be confused with that".

In addition, the families, friends, colleagues etc of Foundation degree students made the same assumption. Participants told us that they found it frustrating that people tended to assume

they were on a lower-level course and that they had to explain the level at which they were studying.

“When I’ve told my family and whatnot I’m doing a Foundation degree, what they’ve thought is: it is a degree with a foundation year”.

“It was a mistake calling it a Foundation degree when there was already something called Degree with Foundation Year. It sends out mixed branding messages. Obviously it’s too late to do anything about it now, to brand it again maybe but I say that because everyone I’ve mentioned I’m doing a Foundation degree to has come back to me saying that’s what they think it is”.

“I don’t think it’s a great name for a degree because, having friends who’ve done lots of degrees, when I say ‘I’m doing a Foundation degree’ they kind of go ‘What’s that? What is that? Why aren’t you just doing the full one? What’s the point?’ My boyfriend did an Art Foundation, which you do when you’re 18 or you’ve come out of A levels, and you do it before you go on to an art course. A lot of my friends thought I was doing a foundation course and they were going ‘Well but you’ve done a degree, why would you go back and do a foundation year? You don’t need to do that’. And I actually had to convince my parents, who are both teachers, that it wasn’t actually a kind of crappy thing: it was actually something that was useful and very academic. But it doesn’t sound like it is. And actually HND sounds a lot higher than Foundation degree and, when I explain to people of the old school of thinking that it’s the equivalent of an HND, they go ‘Ah right, that’s alright then’”.

As a result of this, even once the Foundation degree concept had been explained, some participants were put off by the idea of studying for a qualification with the word ‘Foundation’ in the title. A level three student at Collyer’s explained it as follows, *“Something about ‘Foundation’ makes you sound a bit dense. Maybe if you started on a Foundation degree and you were meeting other people and you said ‘Oh I’m doing a Foundation degree in this’, they’d be like, ‘Oh, what the hell’s that?’ It makes you sound a bit less clever than someone just doing a degree in the same thing”.*

An Honours degree student in her early 20s explained that she had been told about Foundation degrees as part of progression guidance that she received at school (in Wales). However, *“Most people I know that do them are either looking to develop their career that they’re already in or to qualify to change to do something else”.* This led her to see Foundation degrees as irrelevant to her and to conclude, *“If it’s hammered into us at 16 or 18, then it’s obviously not being pushed to everybody else who it’s probably more relevant to”.*

4.2 Sources of information, advice & guidance

Few participants reported having used the services of an IAG agency or being assisted by anyone in their search for IAG. Most had relied on the internet, provider literature (such as prospectuses) and direct contact with providers to investigate available provision. One student at BIMM had seen an advertisement in a music magazine. Younger participants also drew on the experiences of older siblings and friends.

Level three students reported that specific tutors had mentioned routes they might consider following and that they had been taken to FE/HE fairs, or that such fairs had been held at their college. A small number of students at Collyer's had met with a Connexions Careers Advisor at college or had spoken to the HE Advisor at the college. The majority, even of younger participants who would still have been in continuous education when Foundation degrees were launched, reported that no one had told them about Foundation degrees and that they had not noticed information about Foundation degrees at such fairs. Most were not proactive about seeking time with Careers Advisors based within their college.

Participants who we accessed through Horizons relied on Horizons for IAG. Indeed, one was studying for a Foundation degree having been told about it as a result of mentioning to Horizons' staff that she would have liked to have done a degree.

Foundation degree students in related work had found information about relevant courses through sources linked to their work such as a local authority training handbook, or a Manager who had done a similar course.

Older participants reported that it was difficult to find relevant information. A 56 year old female student at Plumpton had approached the Jobcentre for advice and reported that, "*they couldn't even put me on to an Advisor who could talk about broadening my career and training*". One explained that she'd found the websites of the various providers "*confusing*".

Participants wanted a single source of advice, as illustrated by the quote in Box One.

Box One

"I was really surprised about how difficult it was to find out; when I was looking for a very specific course and I wanted to look at the whole of the South East I couldn't find one place to go where they had all that knowledge. There were places that said they did but when I went there they just said 'Have you looked on the Internet?' I went to City College and asked: was there someone there that could help me? And they just said 'Go on the Learndirect website'. And I went to the Learndirect website and then I phoned Learndirect and they'd never heard of the course I wanted to do. They weren't very good. I thought they would do a search and then say whether they do or they don't do it, but they were really quite vague and saying 'You could try here, you could try there' and I was saying 'Well actually I want to make one phone call or visit one place and just get all my options' and it seemed really difficult to do that". (Community/voluntary sector participant)

Others called for a single website "that answers every question" or "a one stop shop that's open a couple of days a week or something in the centre of town. Around Portsmouth they've got something like that where you can go in and you find out all about the degrees, ask any questions you like, and people will know and all the resources are there".

4.3 Potential ways to put the message across

Raising awareness of a new type of qualification takes proactive marketing approaches. A level three student at Collyer's made this point: *"They mentioned [Foundation degrees] at Uni Open Days. I've been to one so far. It was briefly mentioned that we do them and that was it. It wasn't even a 'What are they?' and things. They had a stand about them but no one was going up there because no one knew what they were. If you don't know what they are, you're not really- If you'd heard about them before, you'd probably go 'Oh I remember someone talking about that' and you go and see it. But we'd never really heard about them"*.

4.3.1 Methods

Older students suggested that "infotisations" in local papers explaining the Foundation degree concept would be helpful. They felt that there was a need, in addition to promoting individual providers, to raise awareness of the qualification itself. *"Most of the literature is pretty much 'This is Plumpton and this is what we offer'. There doesn't seem to be much 'These are Foundation degrees and these are the establishments that offer them'"*.

All participants felt that personal contact with providers and students was useful in choosing a course, whether or not they had had such contact themselves. For example, a Foundation degree student told us that *"Plumpton had a pre-open day. It was a mixture of all the different Foundation degree people and you sat there and they told you a bit of bumph about each one and then you were separated into your own groups, and you were taken around the college. That was useful"*.

The story in Box Two illustrates the effectiveness of outreach activities. This participant's route to her Foundation degree had involved such personal contact and demonstrates how, when combined with local provision, it can draw someone who might otherwise lack enough confidence to attend a university, into a university based course.

Box Two

"I've seen a lot of outreach things really work. One person coming in and talking to you can make a huge difference. Giving you confidence to actually walk through the door because you have some notion that there's a person telling you about it rather than leaflets which speak a different language most of the time. They're using acronyms you've never heard of."

Career Action for Women is a course that was through Sussex University and it was with European funding. I did a course exploring learning. You learnt how to do presentations and you learnt how you structure essays because I had forgotten all that stuff."

Through that I then found out about the Foundation degree, and went to a big, big, big meeting at the university. It was really scary. There was like 60 people there and they were getting you all into groups and making you talk and I was like 'I'm not going to talk'."

And then the first year they didn't [deliver the Foundation degree] at university. They did it at the Friends' Centre, and that was good, and that felt really comfortable there and I really

liked going there. But what happened then was, when we went to the university, they kind of asked us, and then we were all a bit like, we didn't know if we wanted to go. But then they kind of made us go because they said 'Actually for your level of learning it's going up so much we think you would benefit from being on the campus because you'll have access to the library and all that kind of stuff' and they were right. They really were right because I hadn't even gone to the library. I mean we'd created our own little library between each other in your group and that was all very important, we all really support each other, but-".
(Community/voluntary sector participant)

The effectiveness of the personal approach was also illustrated by the comments of other community and voluntary sector participants, as follows:

"I must say I had only heard of the Community Development [Foundation degree] because they came into the community to tell us. I didn't know there were other ones. I wouldn't have been in Uni now if it wasn't for [a named individual] coming in from CCE⁹ into the community and into Moulsecoomb about eight years ago that got us on to creative writing. That's the only way".

"And I only knew about Foundation because I met somebody who had been a long service user of another group in Brighton and it was just literally through word of mouth".

"I wouldn't have [enrolled at the University of Sussex] if it hadn't been for [another participant], because she kept saying 'Will you come with me?' and she did that for two years until I actually did and she took me physically to Sussex Uni and then I thought 'Wow!'"

Level three students liked the idea of personal visits by Foundation degree students suggesting, for example, *"Have someone come in who's been on one of them because then they're going to put it in a simple way and tell us exactly what they did"*. The effectiveness of personal contact was demonstrated by a level three student who explained that the focus group had done more than anything else to get information about Foundation degrees across to her, telling us, *"If people come around like you, if you come around and explain to us about it, that would really persuade people to do it"*.

Similarly, employed Foundation degree students thought visits to the workplace to raise awareness of Foundation degrees would be effective. *"It would work for where I work. People coming in to speak about it would be really beneficial because obviously when we're working we're quite busy and we don't always have time to look at, you know, [literature] like this. So yes, raising awareness in the workplace"*.

Given that personal visits may not be feasible or affordable, we discussed, with level three students, whether DVD presented information, for example showing Foundation degree students talking about their experiences, would be engaging for them. Students felt these might be effective except that *"some videos you see they're, like, 10 years old and you can't*

⁹ The Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Sussex.

relate to them any more". They also felt that they were more receptive to information when it was presented to them in small groups (*"If it's the whole year group you don't really pay attention, but if it's more like this [focus group], like a small group [you do]"*) and that *"If it's like the whole year you don't really want to ask a question though, do you, 'cos you feel stupid"*.

Level three students felt that they only place where they were receptive to information about further study options was in college and that they were unlikely to notice or take in such information in other contexts.

In general, participants felt that posters were unlikely to catch their eye, particularly if they are providing information about a new concept, such as Foundation degree. There is a Catch-22 in that, because they don't know what a Foundation degree is, they are unlikely to read a poster which would give them that information. *"Who looks at a poster to find out what university course they can do? I know that I spent ages on the Internet and I never once saw a poster"*. Of course, our participants may have been unaware of the extent to which they are sub-consciously influenced by poster advertisements.

Because most potential students search for information by subject (rather than by course type), participants felt that information on Foundation degrees should be presented alongside information on other pathways within the same subject to provide potential students with information on the range of pathways available to them to reach their goal. For example, one level three student told us, *"Rather than 'Foundation degree: it's this subject, this is one way of doing it, do it that way'. Because that's the way I went into this: 'This is what I want to do. What are the possible routes?'"*

4.3.2 Key messages

Participants suggested that marketing materials needed punchy messages that would catch their eye and speak directly to their way of thinking. *"Tired of what you're doing?" "Want a change?" "That sort of thing to get the career change people"* or *"If it said something like 'Working but want to further your career' or something, 'Change of career'"*.

One level three student at Collyer's explained, *"I think you need to point out that it's not for dumb people. 'Cos none of us actually knew what it was at all. I think you need to have some of the hard facts: that you do it for two years, then you can go and achieve the full degree. I think people need to be made aware that that's what it is, it's not some foundation thing you're doing"*.

Recognising that there is a limit to the amount of information that can effectively be included within an advertisement, participants suggested that the key messages that would hook people's interest were: that a Foundation degree can be a stepping stone to an Honours degree; the flexibility of the study options (and the fact that 'full-time' may not indicate five days per week of contact time, which enables the hours to be fitted around other

commitments); the vocational nature of the training; the entry requirements; the duration of the course; and the level of accreditation.

“I think if you were selling this, one of the things you can sell is ‘Can you spare three days a week for two years’ Because at the end of that you should end up with something’. And the other thing I think about Foundation degrees and if I were looking at promoting them is that it is a stepping stone towards a higher degree but it’s a self-standing qualification: someone who’s done two years and then dropped out of their third year of university hasn’t got anything to show for it, but you have actually after two years. And the other is that a Foundation degree is very vocational in nature”.

One group of Foundation degree students suggested that they would have responded to a marketing campaign that made it clear that Foundation degrees were available from a range of providers within the area: *“Because for me, I would look at the University of Brighton and I’d think ‘Falmer’, and I’d think the roads are terrible round there, I wouldn’t go for it. There’s also a message there that it must be valid as lots of other universities are doing it”.*

Participants with additional needs suggested that an indication that their needs would be addressed would catch their eye, for example a suggestion that free childcare or financial support would be available.

5 ROUTES TO FOUNDATION DEGREES

5.1 Sources of information

The vast majority of the participants who were studying for Foundation degrees had found out about the existence of Foundation degrees, and their course, only after enquiring with their provider about other courses, or even starting other courses. They suggested that they had not been informed about Foundation degrees at school because Foundation degrees were so new. Once they were in contact with their provider, either a tutor or other students had made them aware of the Foundation degree option. Examples are quoted in Box Three.

Box Three

“When I applied I originally started on the BA Music and then I heard about what the modules were for the Foundation degree and how it was different to the BA Honours...so I actually changed courses within like a week of starting. We had sessions about it in school. I had tutorials with my sixth form tutor where she would sit us down and tell us “This is UCAS” and everything that we needed to know about degrees but they never actually focused on Foundation degrees. And I know, when I was applying they had only just started to introduce it because everything before that was pretty much HNDs. So it was something that was very new when I was applying. So I’d not really heard of it and it was only by chance that I actually discovered the Foundation degree here. I would not have really actively gone out and looked for a Foundation degree because I didn’t really know what it was”. (Second year Instrumental & Vocal Tuition Foundation degree student, University of Chichester)

“I was originally accepted on to the Performing Arts course here. I done my first week of Performing Arts, decided it wasn’t for me and it was [another student] who had just transferred on to this course that told me about it. So I spoke to [the tutors], had an audition and then was on. So it wasn’t really planned in a way, it just happened that I was just here kind of thing.” (Second year Instrumental & Vocal Tuition Foundation degree student, University of Chichester)

“I didn’t actually originally choose to do a Foundation degree when I turned up; I originally wanted to go on either a high diploma and go on to do a degree, and I just kind of got it mentioned to me because it was brand new when I came for my audition”. (Second year Professional Musicianship Foundation degree student, BIMM¹⁰)

“One day, one of my friends had this page torn out of a music magazine and he came up to me and went ‘Oh look you can get a diploma in bass guitar, how stupid’. I folded the paper in two and it was an advert for BIMM and then one of the saxophone teachers at my old school was friends with a guitarist and he happens to teach here and I was talking to him one day and he said ‘Oh yeah, I teach at a place called Brighton Institute of Modern Music. Oh it’s really cool’ and then one day I went home and thought ‘I’ve really got to find somewhere to go after A levels’, typed in ‘music college’ [to a search engine] and the first result was

¹⁰ These students thought that their Foundation degree was launched only after they’d applied to BIMM.

Brighton Institute of Modern Music and I thought 'Fine, I'll just go'. So I came down and, when I was offered the FD I was utterly confused because on the adverts, because FD only came out for us like last year, it only had diploma, high diploma and BA. So, when he said 'Oh you're doing a Foundation degree' I was sitting there thinking 'That's not on the list of three', and all my other friends say 'I'm doing foundation courses' and they're the ones before so I seem to have to do a Foundation degree, diploma, higher diploma, BA and I was going to be here for like 12 years. So I came here not really knowing what was going on and I was mildly surprised when I was found out that we were part of Sussex and I could go home and brag". (Second year Professional Musicianship Foundation degree student, BIMM)

"I live local and I didn't do any enquiries as to what was available. I was advised to come here and take an audition and on completion of the audition I was offered a Foundation degree and I said 'Yes. Thank you very much.'" And I didn't know what it was. [The person who advised me] was a private music teacher that I'd had, you know, part-time for a few years and I'd won about seven cups for singing locally in local competitions and had got to Grade Four in theory and Grade Five in practical singing and I got on very well with my music teacher and he pushed me and he recommended I come here and that's what I was offered. So that's why I'm here because I was offered this course and I took it and I love it". (Second year Instrumental & Vocal Tuition Foundation degree student, University of Chichester)

5.2 Importance of subject vs degree model

Most Foundation degree students who participated in the research had selected their Foundation degree because they were attracted by the subject, rather than the Foundation degree model, as this student explains: *"It wasn't actually the Foundation degree, it was the actual course"*.

Similarly, another student told us, *"I wasn't particularly looking for a Foundation degree or a degree. I was just looking for an actual teaching qualification. And I'd looked at the Associated Board and Trinity, looking for vocal teaching, but you have to be 25 before you can actually do that, which I found rather unfair, and so this was the only course in the country actually that really specialised in what I wanted to do"*.

Another told us, *"I decided I wanted to teach piano as a career so I looked on the Internet to see what sort of thing was available. Looked into Associated Board qualifications but with those you have to be currently teaching and at the time I wasn't. And I thought it would be good to do a full time course anyway. So I found this was the only place in the UK that does a degree in instrumental teaching"*.

Several Professional Musicianship Foundation degree students were not motivated by accreditation at all. For example, one told us, *"I'm not worried about getting a degree. I just want to do something I enjoy and if I can get a qualification by doing it then I'll do that"*.

However, a smaller number had chosen a Foundation degree because of elements of the model, including the ability to balance studying with other commitments (*"I'd been looking*

for flexibility to study something as I work and get one day off a week to study and I also have got family so in this case it's probably the only possibility for me to study") and the practical learning model ("I looked at the on-line prospectus and it was for the BA with the minor in IVT¹¹ and there was this little footnote at the bottom which said 'Actually next year we'll be doing this Foundation degree. Go to the back of the prospectus; we'll tell you a little bit more'. And there was about a paragraph saying basically, 'It's a little bit more practical than the BA but basically you can do this and you can top it up' and so I applied for that and didn't go that year and went the year after"). Note that this latter participant had deferred entry to university by a year because she preferred this element of Foundation degree model.

5.3 Choosing a provider by location

While some young people are nervous about running up debts while studying and so are attracted by the financial benefits of studying close to home ("It would mean that I wouldn't have to buy, rent accommodation somewhere far away, I could just live at home"), most are keen to spread their wings and try living independently. For example, a level three student at Collyer's told us, "Going far away, flying from the nest, and looking after your self, I think that's part of university experience. So, if you're going to do it you might as well, you know, do it completely instead of doing just like half of it. I think that's the exciting bit: you have to look after yourself and be responsible and there's just so much you can learn just from learning somewhere in a different environment and meeting all different people".

Older students tended to have chosen a provider close to where they lived, having established a life for themselves in a particular location. For example, a student at Plumpton reported, "I couldn't have done it if it was offered anywhere else. It just wouldn't have been practical. I know other people do drive a lot further but I wouldn't have been able to commit myself to commute any much greater distance than that, certainly not for the other agricultural colleges in the area because they were up in Kent or Hampshire" while another said "I wanted to get some practical skills and this place was more or less on the doorstep and that's what drove me towards it".

As well as seeking local provision, older participants with additional needs defined 'local' more tightly. A Foundation degree student at University Centre Hastings, who was in her 60s, told us she had chosen her course "Because it was local. I mean [to do] the full Honours [degree], you've got to go to Falmer, and I'm not going to be doing that. If they did that extra [top-up] year or two years here, I would do it" and a mother living in Hastings told us, "Local [is important]. I don't really want to travel too much with a child around. If I had to go to Brighton, I definitely wouldn't do it".

Likewise, older participants who were not currently Foundation degree students felt that it would be more practical for them to study at a local FE college than to travel to the University of Sussex or Brighton. One explained that this would outweigh any concerns about prestige. "The accessibility and that aspect of it is much more important than how other people might perceive where you've been learning, to be better than somewhere else. I think the accessibility of it and the ease of getting to work and things like that is much more

¹¹ Instrumental & Vocal Tuition.

important than where it's actually being held. I think they should be as adventurous as possible in their venues where they deliver the courses. So, personally, for me, as near to me as possible is great because I don't have to pay another hour for childcare costs. An hour, an hour and a half, that's £10. And then [for voluntary/community] service users [it needs to be] as in-house as possible because most of them are not going to venture outside into other places".

There was little variation by location of study in Foundation degree students' views on the various topics addressed in this research. However, it was clear that students at BIMM and at Plumpton enjoyed the sense of studying in a location whose atmosphere was appropriate to their subject.

6 FACTORS INFLUENCING PEOPLE TO CHOOSE OR REJECT FOUNDATION DEGREES

As illustrated by the quote in Box Four, once the concept of a Foundation degree had been described to participants they generally liked it (particularly the staged approach to a degree, the local delivery, the opportunity to gain work experience and the opportunity to earn while learning and, for older students, the more flexible entry requirements). For example, our focus group transcriber developed an interest in doing a Foundation degree as a result of learning about them from listening to the recordings!

Box Four

“Could be worth doing. From what you’ve said, it sounds like it’s worth doing. My Maths isn’t that great and I’ve been looking at doing a degree in Engineering and they reckon on having Maths so I may end up doing something like that and, from what you’ve said, it makes it sound more interesting. It’s not just some degree for people who can’t do Maths. Why would you not do a Foundation degree? Why doesn’t everyone do a Foundation degree? If you want to carry on you can always do that, and if you don’t then you can finish after two years, so what’s the disadvantage of doing a Foundation degree?” (Level three student at Collyer’s)

6.1 Attractive features of Foundation degrees

In the context of the low awareness of Foundation degrees reported in section 2, it was not surprising that many participants reported that they had come across the Foundation degree option by chance when searching the internet or a prospectus for courses on their subject of interest.

Often they had chosen their course because of another factor, such as content or location, rather than because it was a Foundation degree. *“Not that I didn’t want to do a qualification but it was as much looking at a prospectus thinking ‘Actually I’m going to really enjoy doing that as well as benefiting at the end from the qualification I get’. The actual modules really, most of them, really, really appealed to me. Specifically, when I was doing them, I thought ‘I’m going to really enjoy that: two years of doing that stuff’ and that was the deal maker really to be honest, in terms of deciding for certain that I wanted to come [to Plumpton]”*.

However, there were aspects of the Foundation degree model about which participants were positive and these are each discussed below.

6.1.1 Work-based learning

Students welcomed the practical focus of Foundation degrees for several reasons, as follows:

- First, a wide variety of participants felt that it would leave them in a more employable position than graduates of purely theoretical Honours degree courses.

Box Five

“I had a lady and a guy that were partners and they both did the full degree, and then they had to do a year voluntary on top of the degree to be able to get a paid employed position, because they needed that experience”. (Level three Collyer’s student)

“Work-based learning is always good because it gives you an impression of what life in the real world is like. Even at university you’re still sort of cushioned a bit, you’re protected from what goes on. In companies and having the work experience is always going to be a good thing”. (Level three student)

“Something you can add to your CV as well. It’s like ‘I’ve been in that situation. I’ve been thrown in there and this is how I coped with it’. This could show that you really are interested in it...like being at the business instead of just learning about it but not actually doing it”. (Level three student)

“One thing that I find potentially very positive about it is the vocational link in that there’s quite a good chance with these courses that you’ll actually tie it in with something that advances your prospects with an existing job. It’s likely to equip you in a way which prospective future employers will see as relevant and will look good on your CV and give you a better chance at getting a job. Sometimes the purer academic ones can seem to be a bit remote from actually what you want to do with the rest of your life”. (Community/voluntary sector participant)

- Second, Foundation degree students liked the fact that it gave them a taster of the career they were considering entering and Professional Musicianship students welcomed the opportunity to take a risk within a competitive industry, while they had external support.

Box Six

“Some people on the [Countryside Management] course have come from a really practical situation. I was doing bits of gardening but it wasn’t anywhere on this scale and it was important for me to feel that I would actually feel what it is really like...In the real world as opposed to just in the classroom or around college”.

“Actually learning more about the industry; it puts it into context, it actually makes it kind of relevant and because there are four different options (you can do a placement with an employer, you can do a self-employed project, and then [the tutor] can set you off doing one or [the tutor] can actually find you a placement with an employer). So it’s just kind of putting everything we’re learning into context and actually kind of getting us out there”. (Second year Professional Musicianship Foundation degree student, BIMM)

”It kind of gives you the chance to make a mistake and then you learn from all that. Like I’m trying to record an album in Milan and I get a lot of guidance from the people here and so that’s classed as work experience. But if I messed it up, I mean if I wasn’t doing the degree I don’t think I’d learn from it, do you know what I mean?” (Second year Professional

Musicianship Foundation degree student, BIMM)

“You get to make a mistake. It allows us to just jump full in, explore, find out what it’s like. And, if you like it, then that’s great, you’ve got that experience, you’ve spoken to the people that you’ve spoken to and you’ve got your foot in the door. And if you don’t like it, you can just stand there and say ‘It’s really not for me, now I know’ and then try something else”.
(Second year Professional Musicianship Foundation degree student, BIMM)

- Third, both Foundation degree students who had chosen their provider because it was locally based, and students on BIMM’s Professional Musicianship Foundation degree, were keen on the opportunity to network within their target industry and develop useful contacts.

Box Seven

“It’s quite a small world, conservation, certainly in this area, and it is useful to get your name and face about a bit and get to know people in terms of future job prospects”

“It being a small world, if you get your face known on the one work placement and they like you, then, even if they don’t then interview you and employ you, they’re likely to know the people that are and be able to give you a good recommendation”.

This was less relevant to younger Foundation degree students who had relocated for their course and were prepared to relocate again once they’d graduated.

- Fourth, some people find it easier to “learn through doing” than to learn theoretically.

Box Eight

“I quite like getting up and doing things. I understand it more than sitting down and constantly learning about it. So, for me, doing vocational would probably benefit me because I’d enjoy it more probably as well”. (Level three Collyer’s student)

“I thought I’d learn a lot quicker by actually experiencing it first hand”. (Foundation degree student)

“What put me off the Community Development course was everyone I knew said it was too theoretical and I am really a hands-on and active person and it’s really good to know that you can do that and then still do the learning if you know what I mean; that’s what I liked about it”. (Community/voluntary sector participant)

“I found the placements really useful and that’s one of the reasons I was really glad I chose this course and not the other ones because I like to go and see, and I always learned well from demonstrations and less, you know, reading and things. And so placements for me was really good to learn so I could observe people and see what they did and see how I could put

that into my own way of teaching and I found it really, really useful. And that's what I would say: the placements for me was what really made the Foundation degree appealing". (Foundation degree student)

"There are certain things that you just can't be taught, you can only experience it. I've written thousands of essays and I can't remember any of them but going out into a school [on placement] or having any form of teaching [practice] or anything like that: I can remember all of that". (Foundation degree student)

Older Foundation degree students were enjoying the balance between theoretical and practical learning, feeling that the theoretical component was more rigorous than for a NVQ and that they would need to demonstrate both types of learning when job-seeking. For example, the majority of participants on the Countryside Management Foundation degree at Plumpton College (aged between 28 and 56) were looking to make a career change and so felt that they needed to gain practical experience, as well as theoretical learning.

A preference for "learning through doing" was not universal among younger participants (though it was the most common view). One explained that she felt under pressure to perform in a real-life situation: *"I like talking about it in groups or being taught by somebody else. I don't like so much find out for yourself by doing it because I don't know, mistakes, you just sometimes feel a bit awkward, especially if other people are watching you or monitoring how you're progressing. If you're not progressing and you're just like 'Hmm', in a work environment. Whereas in a more teaching environment, if you're stuck you can just stop everybody and say 'I don't get this' or ask somebody else for help".*

A small number of participants were disappointed in the extent to which their courses were delivered through innovative, flexible methods. For example, a student at Plumpton College said, *"We've asked about distance learning and really I get a sense that there's resistance there".*

- Fifth, Foundation degree students who were in related work welcomed the opportunity to study without risking losing touch with the workplace by taking a study break.

Box Nine

"I like the fact that you can carry on working because, even if you've changed jobs whilst you're doing the course, you're still getting more skills and everything to put towards your course, which is really good, rather than just stopping everything and studying and then having to go back into it and then it's all changed anyway because it's constantly updating. So it's really good that you can do both and keep on top of both". (Foundation degree student)

6.1.2 Flexibility of learning hours

Several Foundation degree students explained that they were attracted to their course because it was part-time and that the Foundation degree was the only part-time course available in their chosen subject. This is illustrated by the quotes in Box 10.

Box 10

“Ideally I wanted to become a social worker but that is a full-time degree and I cannot afford to take time out of work. So I thought: if I come this route and go into a Foundation degree part-time, I can do this for three years. Then, if I still decide to do a social work degree, I’ve only got to opt out of work for 18 months¹², which for me is more beneficial I think eventually”.

“For me, this was an achievable route because I’ve got two children. They’re 12 and 15 but I don’t have any time and I have to work. And I’m hoping that I can keep up with the studying. And I reckon, in three years time, when my children are older, that will be an easier time for me to do this 18 months top-up. And also because I’ve got a mortgage to pay I could, I hope, more realistically, have 18 months off [rather] than the three years [that would be necessary to do a full-time degree]. So that’s how I decided to do this degree. I looked at the Open University but I didn’t think that was achievable because the work time for that was quite a lot”.

(Social Care Foundation degree students at the University of Chichester)

Another aspect of work-based learning which appealed to participants was the possibility of completing coursework in work time and the fact that it would minimise the amount of time that a student would need to take out of work to complete the course.

School-leavers were not concerned about working future study around other commitments in their lives. Most were expecting to study full-time.

As the quotes in Box 11 illustrate, some community/voluntary sector workers wondered whether flexibility within Foundation degrees would enable learners to stop and start, thereby addressing some barriers. For example, it could help someone who loses the support of their employer (because they lose their job) by enabling them to take a break from their course and start again later.

Box 11

“I think [flexibility is] important especially compared to 20 years ago, when I was in higher education, and the traditional model in this country where you would leave school, go to university, it was a three-year course and that was it. It was essentially start and stop. Whereas, at that time, I knew that in other countries there was more of a semester model

¹² The duration of the top-up course at the same provider.

which was more flexible. So it sounds like it involves a lot more flexibility which I think is a very positive thing...The American system of education...what would happen in a typical case of somebody leaving high school and going to university, it was usually about money, and they'd stop the course [temporarily] and they'd work like hell to get money". (Community/voluntary sector participant)

"You get a lot of people at the Further Education places that they've got families, they're carers, they've got to take their kids at school. As soon as someone is ill they can't go in and, because they missed one lesson, they don't feel they can go back to the second one. And obviously you can't just go down and say 'Oh I want to speak to a tutor' because the tutor is only there once a week and people drop off because of this. If you can drop out and go back, it's very good because...once you're on that treadmill, you fail everything if you don't get your essays in". (Community/voluntary sector participant)

6.1.3 Earning while learning

The fact that Foundation degree courses are designed to enable students to earn while learning was a third aspect of work-based learning which participants found attractive. In fact, for some participants, the attraction was not so much the ability to earn while they learned. Rather it was the ability to learn while they earned. Most level three students expected to have to earn money while they studied to level four or five, and many were concerned that doing a job that was not related to their course might interfere with their studies.

6.1.4 Employer involvement in Foundation degree development

Most community/voluntary sector participants liked the idea that employers are involved in the development of Foundation degrees. Some had higher level qualifications and had struggled to find employment in their chosen field and felt that employer involvement in Foundation degrees might ensure that such courses were valued by employers and more effective at securing entry to a career. One explained, *"I graduated from the university with my Linguistics degree and nobody wanted to employ me. I wished that I'd had that information beforehand so that I could have taken something which was more relevant to the jobs situation"*.

Another told us, *"Having done a degree as a mature student, I came away and it didn't qualify me to do anything. I needed to go and get some voluntary experience and get my foot in the door on an admin role just to get experience with that sort of environment. So something that's vocational, vocationally based I think is much more appealing"*.

There was just one dissenting voice: a participant who questioned whether *"Employers are going to have more influence, where it's all going to be based on employers' money coming in but the more independent sort of cutting-edge of new academic thinking and learning is actually going to be squeezed out of the funding in the longer term"*.

6.1.5 A higher level qualification

Many older Foundation degree students, such as the one quoted in Box 12, were sacrificing short-term earnings to gain a qualification which they hoped would increase their earning capacity in the medium to long-term. As a result, they had chosen a course that would gain them as high a level qualification as they could as quickly as possible.

Box 12

“I decided to go into the deep end... Obviously you’re making a financial sacrifice by giving up a job... If I did an NVQ or something at a lesser level then I’d still have to do something like this to kind of guarantee or get more chance of getting a job so I plumped for this. And then you’ve got the option of a third year if you want to get your full blown degree as well”. Another said, “Some of the jobs that we’re looking at with our qualification it’s like £15,000 a year and, perhaps I’m greedy, but I just couldn’t live on that. So I’m looking that this qualification would hopefully put me in at a slightly higher level in terms of income brackets when I start working”. (Countryside Management Foundation degree student)

The word ‘degree’ in the title of the qualification made it more attractive than, for example, a HND.

However, older students were not universally concerned that their qualification would be university accredited. Some felt it was important, others saw it as a bonus. Students at Plumpton College felt that university accreditation would be important if they were seeking employment outside the local area because *“within Sussex everybody knows what Plumpton’s about. Probably in South East counties: Surrey, Kent, and maybe Hampshire. I think, if you’re going for a job up in East Anglia or Scotland or something, then you might have a recognition issue that you might not have with University of Brighton”*.

A minority of the students at BIMM reported being influenced to select their course by the fact that it was accredited by the University of Sussex.

6.1.6 Flexible entry requirements

Older students without the qualifications which are now standard entry requirements for many degree courses (e.g. A levels) had chosen Foundation degrees because of the flexible entry requirements, as the participants quoted below explained:

“For me, with no A levels, it was sort of a way to sneak into getting a degree because I think I’d be more likely to get into a Foundation degree then do a top up year than just going to a degree course without any A levels”.

“If you haven’t got the academic certificates behind you - I have got some professional ones, but A levels and stuff, nothing. So it’s a good way of doing a career and also getting some education. I’ve never learnt at this level before”.

Most reported that the selection process was by interview rather than by written assessments or previous qualifications. Several described being pleasantly surprised by how easily they were accepted onto their course.

Flexible entry requirements were less important for younger people who were currently studying for A levels and so were not expecting to face such barriers to entry to higher-level courses. In fact, a suggestion that Foundation degree entry requirements might be **lower** than those for Honours degrees put some off the concept because *“If you’re someone who is a shining star or expecting to get all As, to enrol on a course where they only expect you to get a C - it seems like almost you’re setting your sights too low and people are going to be thinking ‘Ooh why are you doing that? You could be going here where it’s so prestigious and they want this and they want that?’”* *“You think ‘Well obviously it’s not that good a course if they only need that amount of grades. So it mustn’t be that hard to do and it mustn’t offer you that much”*.

On the other hand, level three students who were concerned they might not achieve the grades they required for the Honours degrees they were hoping to study, saw Foundation degrees as a potential safety net. *“I suppose it gives options to people who are getting low grades so for example if I decided that I was going to go to university and I got like a couple of low grades, it would mean that I don’t really have to go to a really crap university, I can go somewhere that’s where I can just do a Foundation degree course”*.

A minority of younger Foundation degree students had chosen to do a Foundation degree because the entry requirements were less demanding than for an Honours degree. For example, one explained, *“I was told that it was harder to get on to the degree. If you do the Foundation degree it’s like a natural progression. So for me that’s why I chose the Foundation degree because, to be honest, I never thought I would be doing a degree. I hated school and everything. I didn’t go to college. And then, when I came here, they asked me to do a Foundation degree and said ‘It just progresses into a degree’ and I thought ‘That’s wicked”*.

6.1.7 A staged approach

There were four reasons why participants liked the staged approach to obtaining a degree level qualification that a Foundation degree offers.

First, some felt more comfortable making a shorter-term commitment. This was particularly true of older students who were taking a career break to study and who were concerned that they might struggle financially, as the quotes below illustrate:

“The option of the third year is, I think, a fab option because you can do the first year and the second year and you’ve got all that time to decide whether you’re actually going to, and plan your life so you haven’t committed to three years, but there is a possibility of doing a third year”.

“For me and for other people who are not sure if they want to do a third year, two years is a good time span to feel that you’ve got a qualification. And then, especially if you’re a mature

student as well, and then a third year you can top it up if you want to. And I think that's nice to have that choice. It's not, when you start you know you've got to wait three years before you can do anything with it".

"You've always got the flexibility. You can start the course but you don't have to decide before you start whether you're going to do two or three. You can just see how it goes and what you want to do next".

Second, as can be seen from the quotes below, some were concerned that they were not academically capable of achieving an Honours degree, or didn't have the appropriate ICT skills, and welcomed the opportunity to study for a lower-level qualification as a step on the way.

"I wasn't sure I was going to be able to make it. I'm still not sure about the Latin names but we're getting there but, it's been a very steep learning curve for me because the IT particularly, it's something I'm interested in but I've never had the opportunity to actually do it". (Agricultural Foundation degree student)

"For a lot of us it's a bit of a dry run, a dry run for an Honours degree. Quite a few people on the course were in the same situation: thinking 'Well I'll try that and if it really works out I'll go on to the top up year'".

Level three students who were concerned that they were not capable of achieving an Honours degree were, as a result, even more concerned about the financial implications of degree level study and explained that this made the Foundation degree model attractive.

Third, one level three student suggested that having a Foundation degree could be an advantage when applying for jobs towards the end of a top-up year. In addition to explaining that they were waiting for their degree result, an applicant would be able to present their Foundation degree accreditation.

Fourth, one Foundation degree student welcomed the potential to do the top-up year in a different location. *"You can go and do your last year wherever you want. You don't have to do it at BIMM. I might use my last year as a chance to go travelling. Like go to America and finish my BA off over there. It's actually quite cool that, if you want, you can have a gap year and then complete your qualifications somewhere else".*

Most Foundation degree students had not yet made a firm decision as to whether they would top up their course to Honours degree level. The students at BIMM were unclear as to how the top-up system worked. They didn't understand whether they would end up with two qualifications or just one, or whether progression to the top-up year was automatic or selective, and they held conflicting views as to whether the alternative route (via a Higher Diploma) to an Honours degree was more or less academic and/or more or less challenging.

6.1.8 Subject/Provider can be more important than course

Many Foundation degree students reported that they were studying a Foundation degree simply because that was the course offered in their subject of interest and at the institution they had chosen. So, a Countryside Management student at Plumpton told us, *“For me it was a case of knowing that Plumpton had a reputation for this sort of thing and looking into what they did and then finding out that maybe it was a Foundation degree that was for me, rather than looking for a Foundation degree and settling on Plumpton. So it was actually the institution that made me discover Foundation degrees really”*.

All the BIMM students had made a positive choice to study at BIMM and investigated courses available as a secondary factor.

Most participants reported that, when seeking provision, they would search (either the internet or a prospectus) by subject rather than by qualification type.

6.1.9 Studying with people of a similar age

Older students reported that they had checked what the age profile of their fellow students was likely to be and had been reassured that they would not be studying mostly with school leavers. *“It was an issue. When I met [the course supervisor] I said ‘OK, so how many how people like me are there?’ And she said ‘Oh at least half’. I got real comfort that that wasn’t going to be a problem”*.

They explained that they would have been deterred from applying for a course that mainly attracted school leavers. *“I’ve looked at doing degree courses in the past and specifically decided not to because it’s mainly been people straight from school or nearly straight from school and I’ve just felt I wouldn’t fit in at all and I’d hate it”*.

They tended to avoid areas of their colleges that were dominated by younger people. *“Sometimes when you walk into the Common Room and you look around you think ‘I don’t belong here.’” “It’s like walking into a pub you don’t know. It’s their territory and not ours.”*

6.1.10 Availability of financial support

One Foundation degree student had chosen to do a Foundation degree, rather than an Honours degree because he could obtain financial support only for the former.

6.1.11 Additional study support

A small number of Foundation degree students reported that they were given greater support with developing study skills on a Foundation degree course than they would have been on an Honours degree course.

6.2 Reasons not to choose a Foundation degree

6.2.1 Commitment to achieving an Honours degree

The most common reason why participants considering higher education felt a Foundation degree was not for them was that they were clear that they intended to gain an Honours degree, either because an Honours degree is required for their career choice or simply because they were confident of being academically capable of achieving an Honours degree. Some level three students had known for a long time that they would progress to an Honours degree and so were not attracted by the idea of doing a lower level qualification.

6.2.2 Disparity of esteem

Level three students were concerned that a Foundation degree would have a lower status than an Honours degree in the labour market. Level three students were afraid that, to employers, *“It would look like you hadn’t studied for as long at the level that everyone else is at”* or that *“You couldn’t go the long term for some reason, so you just had like a half-hearted approach”*.

This view was also held by a minority of older people who were not currently studying for Foundation degrees.

It was validated by the experience of some Foundation degree students who were in related employment. One explained, *“The thing about the Foundation degree that I find difficult is that everyone at work, they haven’t got a clue what I’m doing and they don’t value it at all. In fact they think it’s some sort of joke I think because it’s not a degree so they go ‘Ooh what is it then?’”* Another agreed, *“My managers think of it as just a course and they say ‘When do you finish?’ and I say ‘Well, not until like 3 years time’. And they just go ‘Oh right!’ And they keep thinking, everyone keeps thinking that I’m at the college, Chichester College, and when they know it’s at Chichester Uni they go ‘Oh!’”*

The view was reinforced by the experience of some younger Foundation degree students whose parents were not convinced that a Foundation degree was the best route for them (see section 6.2.3).

6.2.3 Foundation degrees seen as appropriate only for ‘vocational’ occupations

Some level three students differentiated between vocational and academic occupations and thought that Foundation degrees might be helpful only for the former. *“It would depend on the subjects you were doing. Because like Engineering or something like that, where you’re actually going to be doing something engineering based, then probably that work experience is good. But if you’re just doing, say, a Maths degree, there’s so many routes you could go on at the end of that and, if you just said ‘Well, yes, I’ve got work based experience as an Accountant’ and actually you’re applying for something completely different, then that’s not necessarily going to be a good thing”*.

Two Professional Musicianship Foundation degree students reported that, though their parents were comfortable with them doing a Foundation degree in Music, they would have been less so with a Foundation degree in an 'academic subject'. So, one told us, *"If it's something like music where in the end it's not really about the qualification you get it's just about getting a job-. But I think, if I go on to do something like Maths and then only got a Foundation degree and not finished it they probably would have been a bit disappointed"* while another explained *"All her life, all my life, [my Mum's] had this mind that I would grow up, go to university somewhere either Oxford or Cambridge and walk away really, really intelligent. My dad also wanted me to go to university but he had a better idea of the fact that my subjects that I chose to follow were more creative rather than academic. So in a sense being [at BIMM] keeps them happy in that the fact that I am in a university kind of situation. Although as far as my dad understands, he realises that practical music isn't like a university subject as such. In fact it is more hands on. Whereas my mother still thinks that and still wonders why I'm not doing music at Oxford or Cambridge"*.

6.2.4 Disruption in progression to an Honours top-up

Some level three students were concerned about the potential for their studies to be disrupted in progressing from a Foundation degree to an Honours top-up course. For example, one suggested, *"A disadvantage of doing the Foundation would be, if you like working with the same tutor, because obviously, once you've done your Foundation, you'd probably have to change your tutor in the third year which is kind of the most important. You'd have somebody that you don't know and you'd have someone completely new again. And then, you then need to go into work placements and stuff and that person doesn't know you as well and it would be more difficult for them. So that's kind of difficult"*. Another backed her up, saying, *"Especially if you've been doing a Foundation Degree at college and, if say you were doing it at Central Sussex College, and you decide to do your third year and you ended up going to a university at, I don't know, anywhere, Bristol, even Brighton, it's the disruption of change of environment as well, not just the change in tutor"*.

6.2.5 Funding issues

Many participants were concerned about funding and saw finance as a barrier to their participation in education. A few were concerned that taking the Foundation degree route would make it harder for them to access funding to reach Honours degree level. A community worker queried, *"If you started with the Foundation degree for three years and you got a loan for that, would you still be able to get a loan to take a degree?"*

Issues around finance were exacerbated by the academic timetable for Foundation degree students in related work. Those that had reduced their working hours to enable them to study part-time were frustrated by the long academic holidays, as they could not go back to full-time work just for this period. They would have preferred not to have the long holidays and to complete their degree over a shorter duration.

6.2.6 Barriers to education in general

A small proportion of participants with strong barriers to higher education (e.g. participants who were caring for relatives with disabilities) told us that they wouldn't be able to take on

working towards a Foundation degree. Though they were keen to train, they were interested only in short courses. While the Foundation degree model reduces barriers to higher education, it doesn't do so enough to enable them to participate.

However, there were also a small number of participants who perceived themselves as facing insurmountable barriers who, it could be argued, would be suitable for a Foundation degree and might be convinced of this if they fully understood what would be involved. One example is this community/voluntary worker with 17 old and 20 year old children who told us, *"There is a totally different way of university education with what you've learnt at school unless you're someone under 25. Now they're taught the same way which you would at university so it's just a progression but the older people were taught in a completely different way. It's a different way of learning to tick the boxes to get your exams whereas we weren't taught that way. You had a question and you either failed it or passed it 100 per cent on these marks"*. She was concerned that she wouldn't have the appropriate learning skills to achieve on a Foundation degree though, it could be argued, she is exactly the sort of person for whom they are designed.

A community/voluntary sector participant stressed the need to provide support to learners who are learning in non-traditional environments. *"It's a good idea bringing it all into the community but you haven't got your study support and the support that you're needing in the community when you're needing it. You've then got to physically make it to the university and all the things that that entails as well and it is this thing of: 'How do I get help?' And to although it's been sold as a Foundation and a vocational one, you're actually asking for academic work to be produced and so the two sides are not equating here somewhere along the line unless there's some money for the support of all this"*.

6.2.7 Lack of employer support

Community and voluntary sector participants were concerned that employers, particularly in specific sectors, wouldn't provide the necessary support and flexibility to enable their employees to undertake a Foundation degree. One explained, *"In the hospitality sector or in hospitals people do shift work. Can individuals who are working in that type of job actually have the flexibility to actually commit themselves to the course? Great, the education sector has become more flexible, that's wonderful, and that meets the needs of a changing society. But employers need to be more flexible in order to allow people who are employed to do the courses and that's not the case in all sectors"*.

They felt that people on low pay would be unable to take on a Foundation degree without employer support, that employers of such workers would be unlikely to provide such support and that, even if the employer did support them, if they then lost their job, it would interrupt their studies.

Another felt that the insecure nature of much employment, especially in Brighton, would preclude many people from applying for a course that required support from their employer. *"Many people are employed in jobs that are insecure, the pay is low. Employers aren't going to care about training and setting up people. They're recruiting on a night-to-night basis. Are*

the Further Education providers looking at that group, which is quite a big group in Brighton?"

7 PARITY BETWEEN PARTNER COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

7.1 Integration of partner college students with accrediting universities

Whether or not Foundation degree students at partner colleges felt ‘part of’ the universities that were accredited their Foundation degrees depended on the extent to which they used the facilities of that university which, in turn, often depended upon how close to the university they lived. One told us, *“I use the main campus down at Moulsecoomb a lot just because it’s quite close to where I live and obviously the library is massive, there’s a big computer pool and their IT facilities obviously are better because they’ve got more money to buy in new equipment, so I tend to use that. So I pretty much feel I’m a university student. But when I’m over here [Plumpton] during the week, it does feel that, in the best possible way, we’re out on our own and we’re doing our own thing”*.

Some partner colleges, such as Plumpton Agricultural College and BIMM, have a strong identity of their own and students at these colleges felt they had *“the best of both worlds”*.

BIMM students varied as to the extent to which they used the facilities of the University of Sussex, such as the library and sports facilities. One or two felt they had missed out by never living in halls of residence.

7.2 Status of partner colleges

With one exception, Instrumental & Vocal Tuition Foundation degree students at Chichester University told us that they would have been just as happy to study at a partner college had that been where their course was offered. The exception was an older student who was studying out of personal interest rather than a financial need to develop a career, and who, without an academic background, was (in his second year) still not over his delighted surprise at being accepted into a university course.

Conversely, Social Care Foundation degree students at the University of Chichester were clear that it was important to them to be studying at a university rather than a partner college, feeling that the quality of teaching would be higher at a university than a college. Their preference for the higher status of a university course might also have been influenced by the fact that their colleagues were failing to recognise that they were doing a higher-level course as a result of being unfamiliar with the concept of Foundation degrees (see section 6.2.2). They also felt that there was a higher proportion of mature students at the University of Chichester than at Chichester College and so, as mature students themselves, they would be less comfortable at the college. However, had the course been available only at Chichester College, they would still have done it.

Most level three students regarded a college course as less prestigious than a university course. Many such students had chosen to do their level three qualifications at a college, rather than continue in school, as the following quotes illustrate.

“You go to school, you go to college, you go to university. Each one sounds a bit more prestigious than the last and, if you’re just going out of college into another college, it doesn’t have the same ring to it”.

“I just don’t think you should do your university degree at college because it takes away from university in a way if you don’t have to go to university to get a university degree”

“Moving up from school to high school, you feel older and you feel more mature. So staying at college and not moving up to a university, you still feel the same kind of level of maturity and you probably wouldn’t have had the same kind of life skills and stuff like that. So, to separate them, you have that kind of jump in life and you kind of push yourself further. Staying at college you’d still be the same, younger person; you wouldn’t grow”.

Similarly, some older participants who were not Foundation degree students, while recognising the benefits of local provision (see section 5.3), felt that *“There’s a kind of perception about the level of learning that’s delivered in the university as opposed to the FE college and I wonder whether it, in some ways, would put people off doing a degree or they’d have a confused idea about the level. Because the physical place you’re in really does I think impact upon how you feel about certain things. So if I was going to the City College I might feel that I wasn’t getting the same level if I was on the campus at Sussex or at Brighton”.*

Others were concerned as to how employers would value a course delivered at an FE college by comparison to one delivered at a university. A community/voluntary sector participant explained, *“The people in the know would know [they were equivalent] but I think there’s a lot of people around who would ask where you were studying. And it would make a difference whether you said it was the University of Sussex or City College Brighton. And then you’ve got to explain to them how it was moderated by the university, and the exams were set by the university, and some of the people who came in to teach came from the university, so you were getting exactly the same quality but I suspect with some people it wouldn’t quite wash”.*

Another community/voluntary sector participant, currently enrolled in a university course, explained *“We have the same tutors going around: whether it’s Horsham or at Fishbourne Palace or Hastings, it’s the same tutors. But, as soon as you go into the university, people look at you differently. You don’t have had to do anything and suddenly you go up in their estimation. Even if it’s a month course or something, people do look at you differently. So if that’s people on the ground looking at you, you know it happens too with the employers”.*

7.3 Reasons for preferring a partner college

Where participants had a preference for a partner college, this was usually a reflection of their desire to study locally (see section 5.3).

However, community and voluntary group participants suggested that some of their clients/beneficiaries *“Would be very, very intimidated by going to university. I think having the other colleges would make it much more attractive to a lot of people who think ‘Oh, I could never go to a university at Sussex’”.* One had personal experience of both university and college based learning and explained, *“I found quite a lot of the higher level, the*

university level, I've found less approachable. The [college based tutors] would actually give more time mainly because, if it's like a night class or whatever, so when it's finished they're not going off to do another class or a lecture or whatever, they can actually give you a bit more time so you can ask those things and I've found it, the people are a lot more approachable".

7.4 Fee levels

As a result of seeing college provision as of lower status than university provision, some level three students felt that fees at a partner college should be lower than those at a university, though this view was not universal. Others felt that, so long as the facilities and the teaching quality were comparable, the fees could be comparable too.

Older participants generally felt that fees should be the same at universities and partner colleges. One explained that setting different fee levels "*Sends out all the wrong messages. Of course some people would want to pay a lower price and some people would think 'Oh I'll pay the higher price because I just want the kudos of the better name'*". Another told us, "*I always look at the content of the course and also I'm interested in who's delivering the course. My experience of doing courses at City College and at university is that there doesn't seem to be much difference in the quality of the people delivering it*". Many felt that fee levels should depend on the provision rather than the type of institution saying, for example, "*If the resources were equivalent and if the contact times were equivalent I don't think it should be any different*". However, they explained that they would want reassurance that this would be the case.

8 EMPLOYERS' VIEWS

The eight employers interviewed for this research were selected through routes which would tend to lead to employers who recognise the benefits of providing/supporting training for their employees. Two were supporting employees to undertake Foundation degrees and four were discussing with Chichester College the potential to provide placements for Foundation degree students. Thus the fact that all but one of them had a good understanding of the Foundation degree model is not an indication that this is typical of employers in general. In fact, they were of the view that most employers were unaware of Foundation degrees.

Consulted employers reported that Foundation degrees meet employers' needs more effectively than do Honours degrees. The aspects of the Foundation degree model which appealed to consulted employers were the following:

- Employer involvement in curriculum development;
- Local provision;
- The variety of learning methods, including methods which are not provider-based;
- The shorter duration of Foundation degrees by comparison to Honours degrees.

Barriers to supporting staff to undertake Foundation degrees included the following:

- Rapid staff turnover;
- Being unable to afford to release staff for training (particularly micro businesses).

In two cases, their support for Foundation degrees was driven by the qualification requirements of their industry.

They did not regard courses delivered by partner colleges as being of a lower status than those delivered by universities.

They reported that the most effective way to involve employers in Foundation degrees (whether in curriculum development, providing work placements or supporting employees to undertake them) was through direct contact with a provider leading to the development of an ongoing relationship. 'Scattergun' marketing methods such as mailshots and emails shots were routinely ignored.

They suggested that, to assess whether to support an employee to undertake a courses, the key information that employers wanted was: the cost of the course; the amount of working time an employee would be required to devote to it; and the course content.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Awareness of Foundation degrees and marketing campaigns

A key finding of this research is there is still much to be done to raise awareness of Foundation degrees and what they offer. Most participants hadn't heard of them or had a false impression of what they were yet, when they had the concept explained, most (both potential students and employers) found it attractive. This is particularly important given the false impression of Foundation degrees that is given by the word 'foundation', with participants reporting that the word gives the impression that Foundation degrees are at a level significantly below level 4, and leads them to associate Foundation degrees with Arts Foundation courses.

This supports the approach being taken by the SLN in producing marketing materials, including take-away leaflets introducing the concept of a Foundation degree and web-based information explaining the advantages of choosing a Foundation degree pathway.

The vast majority of participants did not remember ever having seen materials that have been used to promote Foundation degrees. However, it may be that participants were unaware of having sub-consciously noticed, and been influenced by, such materials.

9.2 Marketing methods

Marketing needs to be undertaken on two levels: first, raising awareness of what a Foundation degree is (complementing and building on national activities such as those undertaken by Foundation degree Forward) and, second, promoting individual providers/courses. While it may be most appropriate for individual providers to take responsibility for marketing their own provision, there is scope for providers to collaborate, and work with organisations such as the SLN and Foundation degree Forward, on the former.

9.2.1 Potential students

Marketing messages that will 'hook' potential students vary by type of potential student. One size does not fit all. For example

- An older potential student with an established family and working life may be interested in local provision so as not to disrupt these. A younger, level three student, though they might consider local provision to reduce costs, may be keen to find a degree course some distance from their family home.
- Older potential learners may be attracted by not requiring A levels for entry. High-achieving younger level three students may think this indicates a lower-status course.
- Similarly, younger level three students who are concerned they will not achieve high grades may be attracted by lower entry requirements while high-achievers may be put off.
- Someone who will be entering the labour market after a full-time course might benefit from being able to demonstrate Foundation degree accreditation in addition to explaining that they were waiting for the result of their Honours degree. This would be less

important to someone who was considering studying part-time while remaining in employment.

All marketing needs to be based on an understanding of the segments that make up each target market. To be effective marketing approaches and materials must directly address the views and needs of specific segments.

It is important not to present a false impression of the Sussex offer. In developing promotional activities to raise awareness of the Foundation degree model in Sussex, stakeholders will need to consider the extent to which the Foundation degree offer in Sussex reflects the picture of Foundation degrees that is presented nationally. For example, are flexible teaching arrangements (for example, involving part-time or evening attendance at college, distance learning or learning via the internet) used in Sussex as much as national descriptions of the model might lead potential students to expect?

Printed/internet based material

When seeking information on provision, participants had most frequently obtained information directly from providers and the internet. They searched for course subjects, rather than types of accreditation. Therefore, there is little benefit in listing Foundation degrees together in a discrete section within a prospectus (unless this is in **addition** to presenting them by subject). This suggests that prospective students are likely to welcome the search function on the Foundation Degrees in Sussex website, which enables them to search provision by subject and/or qualification and/or location (though, of course, this website will only be visited by those who are at least open to the possibility of undertaking a Foundation degree) and that raising awareness of this resource would be beneficial (none of our participants reported being aware of, or having used, it).

The SLN IAG team reports that IAG practitioners (tutors and IAG advisers) find the Foundation Degrees in Sussex directory useful in working with people who would be likely to benefit from the level and style of study offered by a particular type of qualification. While an individual usually expresses a relatively narrow range of subject interests, the directory enables Advisers to access information across a range of subjects and bring to the individual's attention other subjects of potential interest.

The number of visits to the site has been increasing since it was launched and there were significant jumps in usage after materials promoting it were distributed in May and June of 2007.

Marketing materials designed to be looked at briefly (e.g. posters as opposed to prospectuses) should use punchy messages to appeal to specific segments of the market. Since most people don't know what Foundation degrees are, the 'hook' has to be what a segment of the target market might be looking for and the 'punchline' the fact that a Foundation degree can provide this, for example "Do you want to progress within your career? Do you want to train and gain a qualification without taking a career break? A Foundation degree may be the answer you're looking for".

Older students suggested that “infotisements” in local papers explaining the Foundation degree concept would be helpful (an approach applied within the SLN’s marketing campaigns). Infotisements, websites and printed literature designed to be taken away and read at leisure can contain more information, though not so much as to be off-putting. Recognising that there is a limit to the amount of information that can effectively be included, participants suggested that the key messages to include were the following:

- A Foundation degree can be a stepping stone to an Honours degree;
- The flexibility of the study options (and the fact that ‘full-time’ may not mean five days per week of contact time, which means that the hours can be fitted around other commitments);
- The vocational nature of the training;
- The entry requirements;
- The duration of the course;
- The level of accreditation.

All Sussex providers should ensure that their websites and prospectuses contain a brief introduction to Foundation degrees, including success stories of students who are studying for Foundation degrees or who have gone on to gain an Honours degree or promotion at work.

Participants were keen to be able to access a single source of information about learning provision, a finding which supports the approach being developed by the SLN. The SLN’s Learning Opportunities website aims to be a one stop shop for information about higher education provision within Sussex. This is likely to be welcomed by potential learners as a step towards what they want, i.e. a single source for information about **all** provision (at all levels and in all areas)¹³.

The personal approach

It was clear, both from the perceptions of participants as to what marketing approaches affect them most, and from the routes by which participants had come to engage in Foundation degrees (and other types of learning), that the most effective way to disseminate information about learning opportunities is through personal contact.

This suggests that there would be benefit in Sussex providers building, and collaborating, on their existing activities to promote Foundation degrees through personal contact with potential learners at level 3 providers, Adult & Community Education providers, community groups and public places. Our research suggested that potential learners are particularly responsive to visits (ideally involving current or past Foundation degree students) and to taster days linked to Foundation degree provision.

A less resource-intensive way to enable potential learners to engage with current and past learners is, as suggested by the HEIST report, to develop chat forums for this purpose.

¹³ While, on the face of it, it may seem disappointing that none of the focus group participants reported having used the website, at the time of the focus groups the website had been only recently launched.

DVD resources also offer a cost-effective way to enable potential learners to hear from current and past Foundation degree students. Foundation degree Forward produces a range of free DVDs for use by schools and colleges.

It's also vital to ensure that those advising potential learners (classroom teachers, Careers teachers, Careers Advisors, parents, university admissions staff etc) understand what Foundation degrees are and what they offer. As with potential learners, the most effective (though resource-intensive) way to get information to such groups will be through personal contact. Sussex providers might consider how these groups might be reached in conjunction with potential learners (including classroom teachers in talks delivered to level three students at schools and colleges, for example).

9.2.2 Employers

Our consultations with employers and the literature reviewed in section 2 of this report indicate that, as with potential learners, employers are largely unaware of Foundation degrees though employers that know about them like the model. Employers reported that the most effective way to encourage employers to get involved in Foundation degrees (either in curriculum development, the provision of placements or supporting employees to undertake Foundation degrees) is through personal contact. The workshop we undertook with providers demonstrated that Sussex providers are aware of the need to work in this way, and of how resource-intensive such work is.

9.3 Marketing messages

9.3.1 Potential students

The elements of the Foundation degree model that participants found attractive were as follows:

- Work-based learning, for the following reasons:
 - Improved employability;
 - A taster of the career they were considering entering;
 - Opportunities to network within their target industry (particularly students who had chosen a local provider and were likely to remain in the same area after graduating, e.g. older students with work and family commitments, and students in an industry that operates a great deal through networking, e.g. music);
 - A preference for 'learning through doing';
 - The opportunity to study without losing touch with the workplace (particularly older students in employment);
- Flexibility of learning hours (part-time provision and the ability to complete coursework in work time – particularly older students with family and employment commitments);
- The opportunity to earn while learning (and learn while earning);

- Employer involvement ensuring that courses are relevant to the workplace;
- That it leads to a high level qualification;
- Flexible entry requirements (particularly for older potential students);
- Lower entry requirements than for an Honours degree (particularly for level three students who were concerned they might not achieve the grades they required for an Honours degree);
- The staged approach, for the following reasons:
 - A shorter-term commitment (particularly students taking a career break);
 - Concern that they were not academically capable of achieving an Honours degree, or didn't have the appropriate ICT or study skills;
 - Having a qualification to demonstrate ability to employers immediately on completing an Honours degree course rather than having to wait for the result of the Honours degree (mentioned by a level three student);
 - The opportunity to do the top-up year in a different location (mentioned by a level three student);
- Studying with people of a similar age (particularly older students);
- The availability of financial support;
- Provision of additional study support.

Marketing might also beneficially address the concerns that put potential students off Foundation degrees. Among our participants, these included the following:

- Being committed to achieving an Honours degree – some learners felt that, as they were certain that they were going to study to Honours degree level, there was no benefit to them in taking a staged approach. While they recognised that they could progress to Honours level if they gained a Foundation degree, they were not motivated to explore this new option;
- Concern that a Foundation degree would have a lower status than an Honours degree in the labour market (particularly level three students);
- Associating Foundation degrees with vocational learning (particularly younger participants);
- Potential disruption in progression to a top-up course (particularly level three students);
- Concern that funding would not be provided for a top-up course;

- Perceived barriers to participation in learning (e.g. changes in learning styles since the potential learner was last in learning);
- Lack of employer support and insecurity of employment (particularly the low paid).

Marketing should also address concerns that provision at partner colleges would be of a lower quality or status than provision at universities. This needs to be handled sensitively: such concerns were not universal so care should be taken not to engender the view by seeming to 'protest too much'. Participants that had this concern were mostly either older potential learners or level three students, the latter because they perceive a natural progression from school, through college, to university. Some older potential learners were concerned not so much that quality would be lower in reality as that **employers** might perceive it so. Providers might therefore consider how marketing might promote the views of those employers who hold Foundation degrees delivered at partner colleges in high esteem.

9.3.2 Employers

Liaison with employers should stress the following aspects of Foundation degrees:

- Employer involvement in curriculum development;
- Local provision;
- The variety of learning methods, including methods which are not provider-based;
- The shorter duration of Foundation degrees by comparison to Honours degrees.

It should also address the following barriers to supporting staff to undertake Foundation degrees:

- Rapid staff turnover;
- Being unable to afford to release staff for training (particularly micro businesses).

Initial contact should provide the following key information:

- The cost of provision;
- The amount of working time an employee would be required to devote to the course
- The course content.

9.4 Summary – recommendations for key stakeholders

Table 9.1 summarises our recommendations for providers, for the SLN and for the SLN to progress with other stakeholders, indicating which of these stakeholders is likely to be key in implementing each one.

Table 9.1: Recommended actions for key stakeholders

Responsibility	Direct action		Action for the SLN to progress with partners	
	Sussex Fd providers	The SLN	Fdf	Other IAG providers ¹⁴
Action				
Address specific segments of target markets with all materials and activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Continue developing & distributing materials introducing the Fd concept and its advantages (and addressing the perceptions that put people off Fds)		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Consider the extent to which the Sussex offer matches the national Fd model and ensure that marketing materials present an accurate picture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Promote the Foundation Degrees in Sussex website, and its search function	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Promote the Learning Opportunities website and its search function	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure websites and prospectuses contain a brief introduction to Fds and success stories of Fd students	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Provide a single source of information about learning provision		<input type="checkbox"/>		
Develop and build on ways (visits, chat rooms, DVDs) to enable potential Fd students to hear directly from past and present Fd students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Provide taster days linked to Fds	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Ensure that those advising potential Fd students understand the Fd concept	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Raise employer awareness of the Fd model and its benefits (and address perceived barriers in marketing materials)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

¹⁴ E.g. Connexions, Nextstep.

Appendix One

Topic guides

Topic guide

Current & potential foundation degree students in employment

1. Each participant to introduce themselves (age, job role, how long worked for this employer and in this role; area of residence and living situation, disability status, family history of engaging with higher education, those doing foundation degrees: which degree, which provider, which year of study) (also note gender, ethnicity);
2. Awareness of foundation degrees;
3. Expectations of foundation degrees;
4. Aspirations for study, including foundation degrees;
5. Motivation for studying (change of career direction, advancement);
6. How attractive are foundation degrees by comparison with other ways of studying?
7. Perceived benefits and disadvantages of learning methods (e.g. duration, work-based learning approach, providers, vocational focus, flexible learning options - distance learning, e-learning, modular provision - local delivery);
8. Other aspects of foundation degrees that encourage and discourage take-up/perceived benefits & disadvantages of undertaking foundation degrees:
 - Shorter than Honours degree;
 - Local delivery;
 - Accredited by university;
 - Learn alongside Uni students;
 - Quality;
 - Specific providers;
 - Range of provision (by comparison with other courses);
 - Academic study is balanced with practical, work-based learning;
 - Opportunity to develop relationship with future employers;
 - Get vocational experience;
 - More interesting learning environment;
 - Natural progression from level three study (employment focused HE qualification that will help enter/progress in employment while keeping options open regarding studying for Honours degree);
 - Opportunity to progress to Honours degree;
 - Can earn while learning;
 - Cheaper than Honours degree ('cos shorter);
 - Availability of bursaries (full cost is between £1,200 and £3,000 pa);
 - Part-time fees enable you to spread the cost;
 - Opportunity for career development

- Flexible delivery around work and life commitments;
 - Entry requirements can be lower than for Honours degrees;
 - Entry requirements can be more flexible than for Honours degrees (e.g. accreditation of prior experience);
 - More achievable than Honours degree;
 - Gradual/supported re-entry to employment
 - Designed for older students.
9. What is the relative status of courses at/qualifications from universities and partner colleges? If a degree were accredited by local college, would it have the same status? Should fees at partner colleges be lower than fees at universities? Do/would you prefer studying at a partner college or a university? Why (e.g. accessibility)?
10. Sources of information about foundation degrees;
11. Accuracy of information obtained from various sources;
12. Awareness of elements of current marketing campaign(s) and responses to them;
13. Should information on Foundation Degrees be integrated with information on full degrees within a prospectus or in a separate section?
14. Perceptions of the effectiveness of potential marketing approaches:
- HE fairs;
 - Visits/talks from HEIs;
 - Introduction to FDs on websites of institutions;
 - Opportunities to communicate with current FD students;
 - Prospectus (should FDs be alongside Honours degrees or separate? Do you search by course type or subject?);
 - Website (do you search by course type or subject?);
 - Guidance from IAG centres including Connexions;
 - Display boards;
 - Open evenings;
 - Course leaflets in local free newspapers;
 - Leaflets in libraries and community centres;
 - Leaflets elsewhere (where?);
 - Stalls in local shopping centres and other public places (where?);
 - Posters;
 - Advertisements/flyers in trade journals;
 - Advertising on buses and bus stops;
 - Advertising on local radio;
15. Extent of desire for further information.

Topic guide

Current foundation degree students

1. Each participant to introduce themselves (age, year of study, course, area of residence and living situation, whether current employed in related field, disability status, family history of engaging with higher education) (also note gender, ethnicity);
2. Reasons for choosing a foundation degree (open, followed by prompt: duration, work-based learning approach, provider, vocational focus, flexible learning options);
3. Experience, perceptions and satisfaction with learning methods (e.g. work-based learning, flexible learning options - distance learning, e-learning, modular provision);
4. Other aspects of foundation degrees that encourage and discourage take-up/benefits & disadvantages of undertaking foundation degrees
 - Shorter than Honours degree;
 - Local delivery;
 - Accredited by university;
 - Learn alongside Uni students;
 - Quality;
 - Specific providers;
 - Range of provision (by comparison with other courses);
 - Academic study is balanced with practical, work-based learning;
 - Opportunity to develop relationship with future employers;
 - Get vocational experience;
 - More interesting learning environment;
 - Natural progression from level three study (employment focused HE qualification that will help enter/progress in employment while keeping options open regarding studying for Honours degree);
 - Opportunity to progress to Honours degree;
 - Can earn while learning;
 - Cheaper than Honours degree ('cos shorter);
 - Availability of bursaries (full cost is between £1,200 and £3,000 pa);
 - Part-time fees enable you to spread the cost;
 - Opportunity for career development
 - Flexible delivery around work and life commitments;
 - Entry requirements can be lower than for Honours degrees;
 - Entry requirements can be more flexible than for Honours degrees (e.g. accreditation of prior experience);
 - More achievable than Honours degree;
5. Alternative routes participants would have chosen in the absence of foundation degrees;

6. Reasons for choosing provider (open, followed by prompt: location, course reputation, provider reputation, choices of others);
7. What is the relative status of courses at/qualifications from universities and partner colleges? If a degree were accredited by a local college, would it have the same status? Should fees at partner colleges be lower than fees at universities? Do/would you prefer studying at a partner college or a university? Why (e.g. accessibility)?
8. Experience of applying learning in the workplace (employed students only);
9. Effect of studying on working experience (employed students only), e.g. commitment to employer, motivation, job satisfaction);
10. Sources of information about foundation degrees;
11. Accuracy of information obtained from various sources;
12. Awareness of elements of current marketing campaign(s) and responses to them (show materials);
13. How effective were/would have been these marketing approaches when you were considering what to do next (i.e. when you chose to do a FD)?:
 - HE fairs;
 - Visits from HEIs to talk to tutor groups/evening classes;
 - Visits from HEIs to talk to community groups;
 - Introduction to FDs on websites of institutions;
 - Opportunities to communicate with current FD students;
 - Prospectus (should FDs be alongside Honours degrees or separate? Do you search by course type or subject?);
 - Website (do you search by course type or subject?);
 - Guidance from IAG centres including Connexions;
 - Display boards;
 - Open evenings;
 - Course leaflets in local free newspapers;
 - Leaflets in libraries and community centres;
 - Leaflets elsewhere (where?);
 - Stalls in local shopping centres and other public places (where?);
 - Posters;
 - Advertisements/flyers in trade journals;
 - Advertising on buses and bus stops;
 - Advertising on local radio;
14. Expectations of foundation degrees and extent to which these are being met.

Topic guide

Potential foundation degree students in education

1. Each participant to introduce themselves (age, year of study, course, area of residence and living situation, whether current employed in related field, disability status, family history of engaging with higher education) (also note gender, ethnicity);
2. Awareness of foundation degrees;
3. Expectations of foundation degrees
4. Aspirations for further study, including foundation degrees. What do they expect to do next?;
5. How attractive are foundation degrees by comparison with other progression routes?
6. Reasons for attraction of foundation degrees. *Open, followed by prompt:*
 - Shorter than Honours degree;
 - Local delivery;
 - Accredited by university;
 - Learn alongside Uni students;
 - Quality;
 - Specific providers;
 - Range of provision (by comparison with other courses);
 - Academic study is balanced with practical, work-based learning;
 - Opportunity to develop relationship with future employers;
 - Get vocational experience;
 - More interesting learning environment;
 - Natural progression from level three study (employment focused HE qualification that will help enter/progress in employment while keeping options open regarding studying for Honours degree);
 - Opportunity to progress to Honours degree;
 - Can earn while learning;
 - Cheaper than Honours degree ('cos shorter);
 - Availability of bursaries (full cost is between £1,200 and £3,000 pa);
 - Part-time fees enable you to spread the cost;
 - Opportunity for career development
 - Flexible delivery around work and life commitments;
 - Entry requirements can be lower than for Honours degrees;
 - Entry requirements can be more flexible than for Honours degrees (e.g. accreditation of prior experience);
 - More achievable than Honours degree;

7. Perceived benefits and disadvantages of learning methods (e.g., work-based learning approach, providers, vocational focus, flexible learning options - distance learning, e-learning, modular provision - local delivery);
8. What is the relative status of courses at/qualifications from universities and partner colleges? If a degree were accredited by a local college, would it have the same status? Should fees at partner colleges be lower than fees at universities? Do/would you prefer studying at a partner college or a university? Why (e.g. accessibility)?
9. Sources of information about foundation degrees;
10. Accuracy of information obtained from various sources;
11. Awareness of elements of current marketing campaign(s) and responses to them;
12. Perceptions of the effectiveness of potential marketing approaches:
 - HE fairs;
 - Visits from HEIs to talk to tutor groups/evening classes;
 - Visits from HEIs to talk to community groups;
 - Introduction to FDs on websites of institutions;
 - Opportunities to communicate with current FD students;
 - Prospectus (should FDs be alongside Honours degrees or separate? Do you search by course type or subject?);
 - Website (do you search by course type or subject?);
 - Guidance from IAG centres including Connexions;
 - Display boards;
 - Open evenings;
 - Course leaflets in local free newspapers;
 - Leaflets in libraries and community centres;
 - Leaflets elsewhere (where?);
 - Stalls in local shopping centres and other public places (where?);
 - Posters;
 - Advertisements/flyers in trade journals;
 - Advertising on buses and bus stops;
 - Advertising on local radio;
13. Extent of desire for further information.

Topic guide

Potential foundation degree students currently unemployed

1. Each participant to introduce themselves (age, area of residence and living situation, vocational areas of interest, work history, disability status, family history of engaging with higher education) (also note gender, ethnicity);
2. Awareness of foundation degrees;
3. Expectations of foundation degrees;
4. Aspirations for further study, including foundation degrees;
5. Motivation for studying (change of career direction, get back into previous career area etc);
6. How attractive are foundation degrees by comparison with other options?
7. Reasons for attraction of foundation degrees. *Open, followed by prompt:*
 - Shorter than Honours degree;
 - Local delivery;
 - Accredited by university;
 - Learn alongside Uni students;
 - Quality;
 - Specific providers;
 - Range of provision (by comparison with other courses);
 - Academic study is balanced with practical, work-based learning;
 - Opportunity to develop relationship with future employers;
 - Get vocational experience;
 - More interesting learning environment;
 - Natural progression from level three study (employment focused HE qualification that will help enter/progress in employment while keeping options open regarding studying for Honours degree);
 - Opportunity to progress to Honours degree;
 - Can earn while learning;
 - Cheaper than Honours degree ('cos shorter);
 - Availability of bursaries (full cost is between £1,200 and £3,000 pa);
 - Part-time fees enable you to spread the cost;
 - Opportunity for career development
 - Flexible delivery around work and life commitments;
 - Entry requirements can be lower than for Honours degrees;
 - Entry requirements can be more flexible than for Honours degrees (e.g. accreditation of prior experience);
 - More achievable than Honours degree;

- Gradual/supported re-entry to employment
 - Designed for older students.
8. Perceived benefits and disadvantages of learning methods (e.g., work-based learning approach, providers, vocational focus, flexible learning options - distance learning, e-learning, modular provision - local delivery);
9. What is the relative status of courses at/qualifications from universities and partner colleges? If a degree were accredited by a local college, would it have the same status? Should fees at partner colleges be lower than fees at universities? Do/would you prefer studying at a partner college or a university? Why (e.g. accessibility)?
10. Sources of information about foundation degrees;
11. Accuracy of information obtained from various sources;
12. Awareness of elements of current marketing campaign(s) and responses to them;
13. Perceptions of the effectiveness of potential marketing approaches:
- HE fairs;
 - Visits from HEIs to talk to tutor groups/evening classes;
 - Visits from HEIs to talk to community groups;
 - Introduction to FDs on websites of institutions;
 - Opportunities to communicate with current FD students;
 - Prospectus (should FDs be alongside Honours degrees or separate? Do you search by course type or subject?);
 - Website (do you search by course type or subject?);
 - Guidance from IAG centres including Connexions;
 - Display boards;
 - Open evenings;
 - Course leaflets in local free newspapers;
 - Leaflets in libraries and community centres;
 - Leaflets elsewhere (where?);
 - Stalls in local shopping centres and other public places (where?);
 - Posters;
 - Advertisements/flyers in trade journals;
 - Advertising on buses and bus stops;
 - Advertising on local radio;
14. Extent of desire for further information.

Topic guide

Employers currently supporting

1. Main business, number of employees, extent of autonomy from parent company etc, policy regarding supporting employees in higher education;
2. Reasons for supporting employees on foundation degrees;
3. Expectations of foundation degrees and extent to which these are being met;
4. Benefits to the business of employees undertaking foundation degrees:
 - Local provision;
 - Focused on developing vocational skills;
 - Provide a way to ‘grow your own managers’;
 - Practical and business benefits from employees taking the course;
 - Previous training employees have undertaken while with you or previous employers may contribute to entry requirements or the degree itself;
 - Increase efficiency of workforce;
 - Enhance employee retention;
 - Only need to meet full cost (£1,200 to £3,000pa) if required closed course for own workforce;
 - Part-time fees enable you to spread the cost;
 - Industry-led qualification;
 - University standard qualification;
5. How do Foundation Degrees compare to other qualifications in these respects?;
6. Disadvantages to the business of employees undertaking foundation degrees (e.g. costs, time, administration, retention);
7. How do Foundation Degrees compare to other qualifications in these respects?;
8. Benefits to the employee of undertaking foundation degrees (e.g. job satisfaction, career development, confidence);
9. Disadvantages to the employee of undertaking foundation degrees (e.g. time);
10. Experience, perceptions and satisfaction with learning methods (e.g. workplace learning, distance learning, e-learning, modular provision, local delivery);
11. Reasons for choosing provider(s);
12. Perception of relative status of providers;

13. Perception of relative status of degrees from universities and partner colleges;
14. Sources of information about foundation degrees;
15. Accuracy of information obtained from various sources;
16. Perceptions of the effectiveness of potential marketing approaches:
 - HE fairs;
 - Visits from HEIs to talk to tutor groups/evening classes;
 - Visits from HEIs to talk to community groups;
 - Introduction to FDs on websites of institutions;
 - Opportunities to communicate with current FD students;
 - Prospectus (should FDs be alongside Honours degrees or separate? Do you search by course type or subject?);
 - Website (do you search by course type or subject?);
 - Guidance from IAG centres including Connexions;
 - Display boards;
 - Open evenings;
 - Course leaflets in local free newspapers;
 - Leaflets in libraries and community centres;
 - Leaflets elsewhere (where?);
 - Stalls in local shopping centres and other public places (where?);
 - Posters;
 - Advertisements/flyers in trade journals;
 - Advertising on buses and bus stops;
 - Advertising on local radio;
17. Extent of desire for further information;
18. Awareness of elements of current marketing campaign(s) and responses to them.

Topic guide

Employers not currently supporting

1. Main business, number of employees, extent of autonomy from parent company etc, policy regarding supporting employees in higher education;
2. Awareness of foundation degrees;
3. Whether would consider supporting employees to undertake foundation degrees and reasons for response;
4. Benefits to the business of employees undertaking foundation degrees:
 - Local provision;
 - Focused on developing vocational skills;
 - Provide a way to ‘grow your own managers’;
 - Practical and business benefits from employees taking the course;
 - Previous training employees have undertaken while with you or previous employers may contribute to entry requirements or the degree itself;
 - Increase efficiency of workforce;
 - Enhance employee retention;
 - Only need to meet full cost (£1,200 to £3,000pa) if required closed course for own workforce;
 - Part-time fees enable you to spread the cost;
 - Industry-led qualification;
 - University standard qualification;
5. How do Foundation Degrees compare to other qualifications in these respects?;
6. Disadvantages to the business of employees undertaking foundation degrees (e.g. costs, time, administration, retention);
7. How do Foundation Degrees compare to other qualifications in these respects?;
8. Perceptions of benefits to the employee of undertaking foundation degrees (e.g. job satisfaction, career development, confidence);
9. Perceptions of disadvantages to the employee of undertaking foundation degrees (e.g. time);
10. Perceptions of benefits/disadvantages of learning methods (e.g. workplace learning, distance learning, e-learning, modular provision, local delivery);

11. Perceptions of benefits/disadvantages of employees undertaking foundation degrees by comparison to other courses of study, for the employee and for the employer (e.g. accessibility, vocational focus, tailoring);
12. Sources of information about foundation degrees;
13. Accuracy of information obtained from various sources;
14. Perceptions of the effectiveness of potential marketing approaches:
 - HE fairs;
 - Visits from HEIs to talk to tutor groups/evening classes;
 - Visits from HEIs to talk to community groups;
 - Introduction to FDs on websites of institutions;
 - Opportunities to communicate with current FD students;
 - Prospectus (should FDs be alongside Honours degrees or separate? Do you search by course type or subject?);
 - Website (do you search by course type or subject?);
 - Guidance from IAG centres including Connexions;
 - Display boards;
 - Open evenings;
 - Course leaflets in local free newspapers;
 - Leaflets in libraries and community centres;
 - Leaflets elsewhere (where?);
 - Stalls in local shopping centres and other public places (where?);
 - Posters;
 - Advertisements/flyers in trade journals;
 - Advertising on buses and bus stops;
 - Advertising on local radio;
15. Extent of desire for further information;
16. Awareness of elements of current marketing campaign(s) and responses to them.

Appendix Two

Research participants

Papworth Research & Consultancy and the Sussex Learning Network is grateful to all the below who generously gave their time to participate in this research.

Workshop participants

- Susan Lightfoot, Marketing and Communications, University of Brighton
- Colin Whitaker, Chichester College
- Karen Arnold, Head of Marketing, Recruitment & External Relations, University of Chichester
- Neal Edwards, Marketing Officer, City College Brighton and Hove
- Liz Long, Northbrook College.

Focus group participants

Current Foundation degree students

- Four male and two female mature¹⁵ students in the first year of a full-time Countryside Management Foundation degree at Plumpton College.
- Four male and six female students in the second year of a full-time Instrumental & Vocal Tuition Foundation degree at Chichester College, six of whom were mature students;
- Six male and four female students in the second year of a full-time Professional Musicianship Foundation degree at the Brighton Institute of Modern Music (BIMM), one of whom was a mature student;

Current Foundation degree students in related employment

- Four female students in the first year of a part-time Social Care Foundation Degree at the University of Chichester (which requires students to be in related employment), two of whom were mature students;

Potential Foundation degree in education

- One male and one female level three student at Collyer's College;
- Five male and four female level three students at Collyer's College;
- Three male and three female level three students at Bexhill College;

¹⁵ I.e. aged over 25.

- Two male and one female level three students at Bexhill College;

Potential Foundation degree students with additional needs¹⁶ (or representatives of such individuals)

- Six female and one male clients of the Horizons Community Learning Project in Hastings;
- Three male and ten female clients of the Working Together Project in Brighton;
- Three male and nine female clients of the Working Together Project in Brighton.

Consulted employers

- Eight employers, of which two were supporting employees to undertake Foundation degrees and four were discussing with Chichester College the potential to provide placements for Foundation degree students. All were selected through routes which would tend to lead to employers who recognise the benefits of providing/supporting training for their employees. Five were in the fitness sector, one was a letting agent, one was in the public sector and one was a voluntary organisation. One was a local authority, one employed 150 people, five employed between 20 and 35 people each, and one employed less than five people.

¹⁶ Including people with needs relating to mental health, learning disabilities, substance misuse, being refugees or asylum seekers, homelessness and abuse.