THE IMPACT OF FOUNDATION YEARS ON HIGHER EDUCATION SUCCESS

EMILY WARNER, UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX

DR JONATHAN SLY, THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

University of Essex

What is a Foundation Year? Who is it for, and what does it entail?

Emily Warner
Head of UK Student Recruitment
Schools and Colleges Engagement

University of Essex

What is a Foundation Year?

One year of study taken **before** embarking on an undergraduate degree.

Who is a Foundation Year for?

Students who

- May not have the grades for Year 1.
- Have non-traditional qualifications or experience.
- Are returning to study after time away from university.
- Are looking for more support during the transition to university.

University of Essex

The foundation year is usually subject specific

These can be course specific or subject pathways

Course examples – ‘including Foundation Year’

- BA History (including Foundation Year)
- BSc Biological Sciences (including Foundation Year)
- LLB Law (including Foundation Year)

Pathway subject examples:

- Arts and Humanities
- Business and Economics
- Computer Science and Maths
- Law
- Life Sciences
- Psychology
- Social Sciences
- Sport, Rehabilitation, and Exercise Sciences

The University of Manchester

The impact of Foundation Years on Higher Education success

What is the role of Foundation Years in supporting student success in HE and beyond?

Jonathan Sly
Senior Lecturer and Admissions Tutor, Faculty of Science and Engineering
sly@manchester.ac.uk

Today’s session

- I’ll be talking about the potential benefits of Foundation Years and how they can support student success at University and beyond.
- The examples I’ll be using are what I know best, which are the Science and Engineering Foundation Years at the University of Manchester.
- There will be differences in the detail for different Foundation Years, but the general principles are the same.

Supporting success in HE and beyond…

Potential benefits?

- access and opportunity

Supporting success in HE and beyond…

Potential benefits?

- access and opportunity

example: entry requirements for science and engineering at the University of Manchester

	First year	Foundation Year
Physics	A*A*A	BBB – AAB
Computer Science	A*A*A	ABB – AAA
Mechanical Engineering	A*A*A	BBB – AAB
Chemical Engineering	AAA	BBC – ABB

Supporting success in HE and beyond…

Potential benefits?

- access and opportunity
- equipped for first-year

example: curriculum for the Aerospace Engineering Integrated Foundation Year

Maths (6 units)	Physics (3 units)	General (3 units)
•calculus and algebra •series, matrices, geometry •polar coordinates, numerical methods, recurrence relations, reduction formulae, Mathematica •sets, De Morgan's Laws, elementary logic, proof by contradiction and induction •probability theory •vectors •mechanics	•dimensional analysis •energy, temperature, heat, ideal gases, kinetic theory, thermodynamics •deformation of solids •electrostatics •electromagnetism •atomic energy levels, band theory of solids, semiconductors •simple harmonic oscillation, waves and harmonics •electromagnetic radiation •wave-particle duality •radioactivity, nuclear reactions	•ICT •Academic Skills •Group project

Supporting success in HE and beyond…

Potential benefits?

- access and opportunity
- equipped for first-year
- supporting the transition to HE
- laying foundations for future success

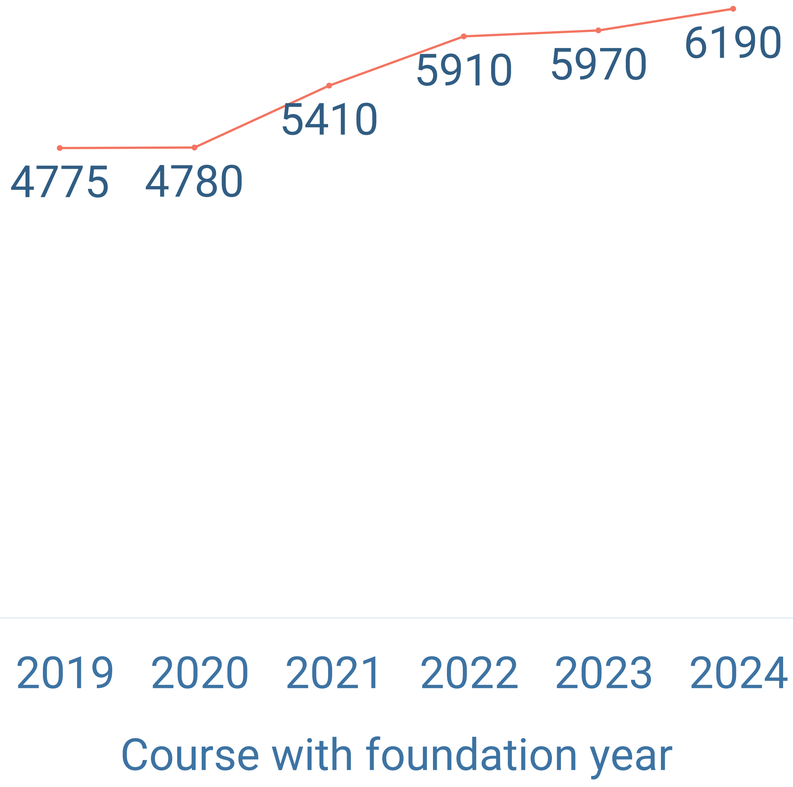
Key takeaway?

Don’t forget Foundation Years! A Foundation Year can widen options, open doors and extend possibilities.

UCAS DATA

Philippa Alway – Senior Policy Adviser (Skills, Schools and Colleges)

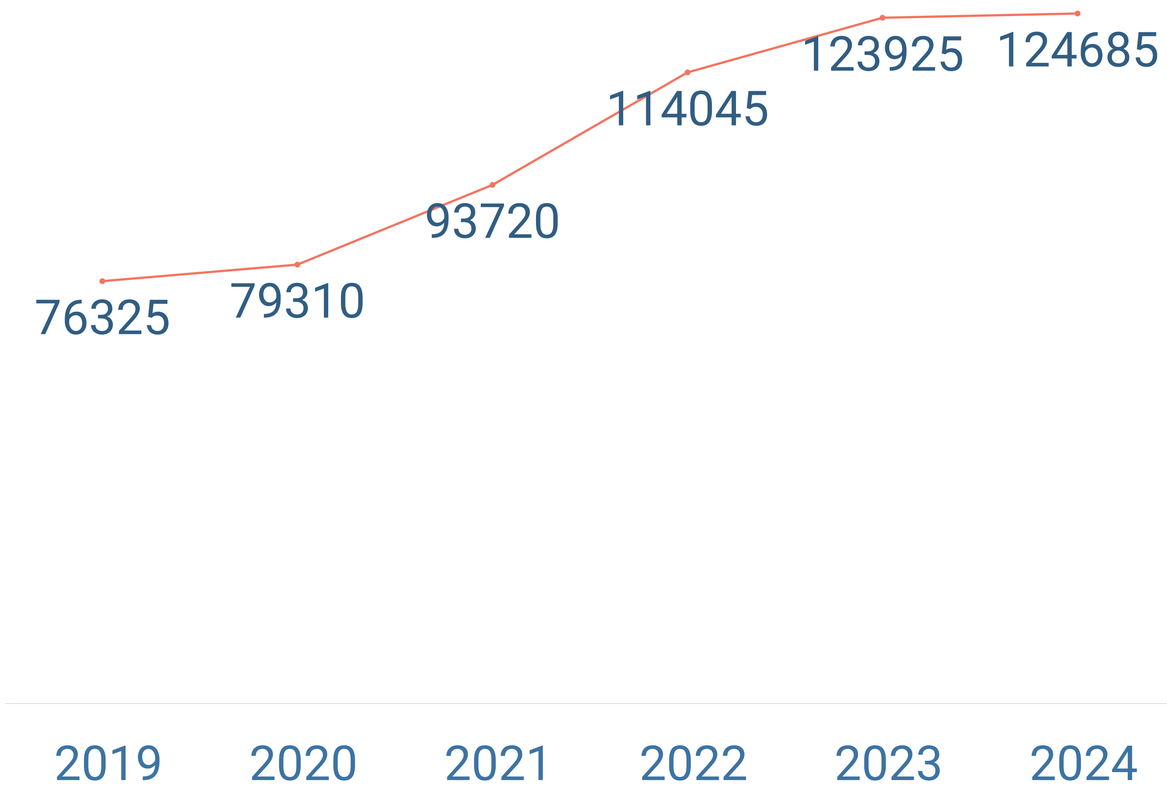
FOUNDATION YEARS AVAILABILITY INCREASING



3.7% (220) increase since 2023

29.6% (1415) increase since 2019

APPLICANTS WITH AT LEAST ONE CHOICE INCREASING



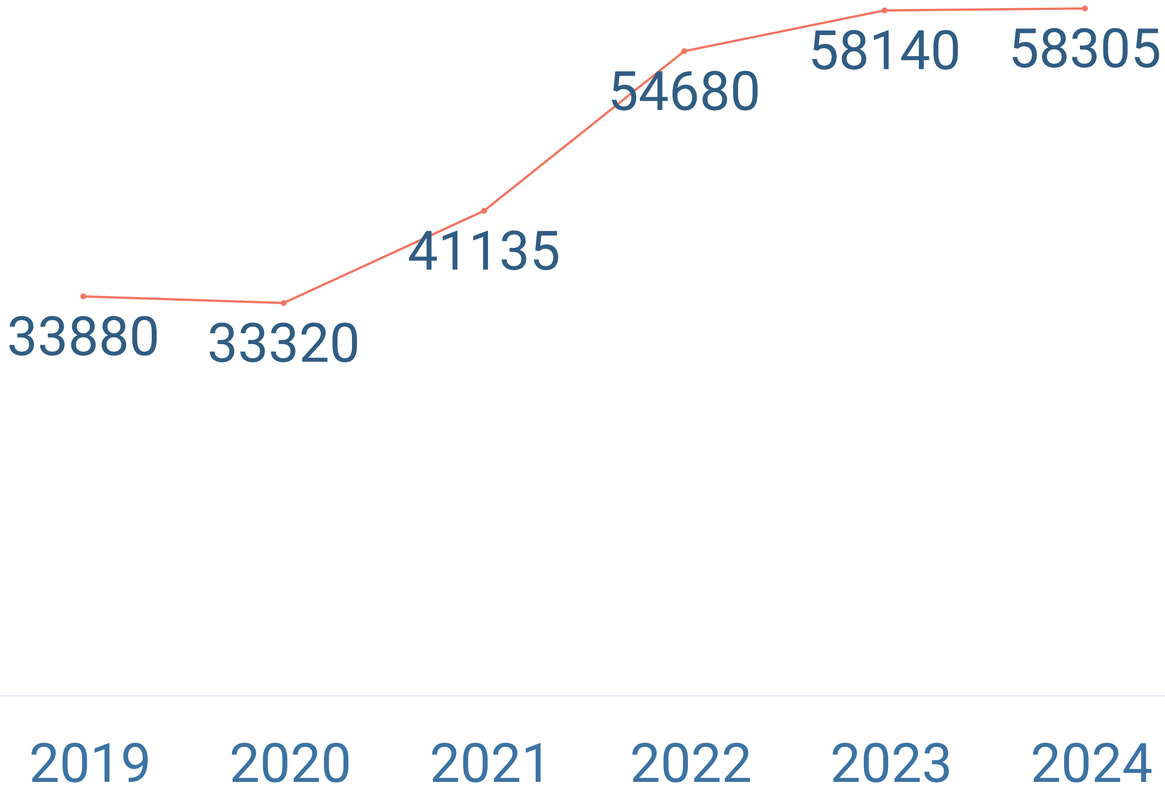
0.6% (670) increase since 2023

63.4% (48,355) increase since 2019

-

In 2024 represented 16.6% of applicants - up from 10.9% in 2019 and 16.5% in 2023

ACCEPTANCES INCREASING



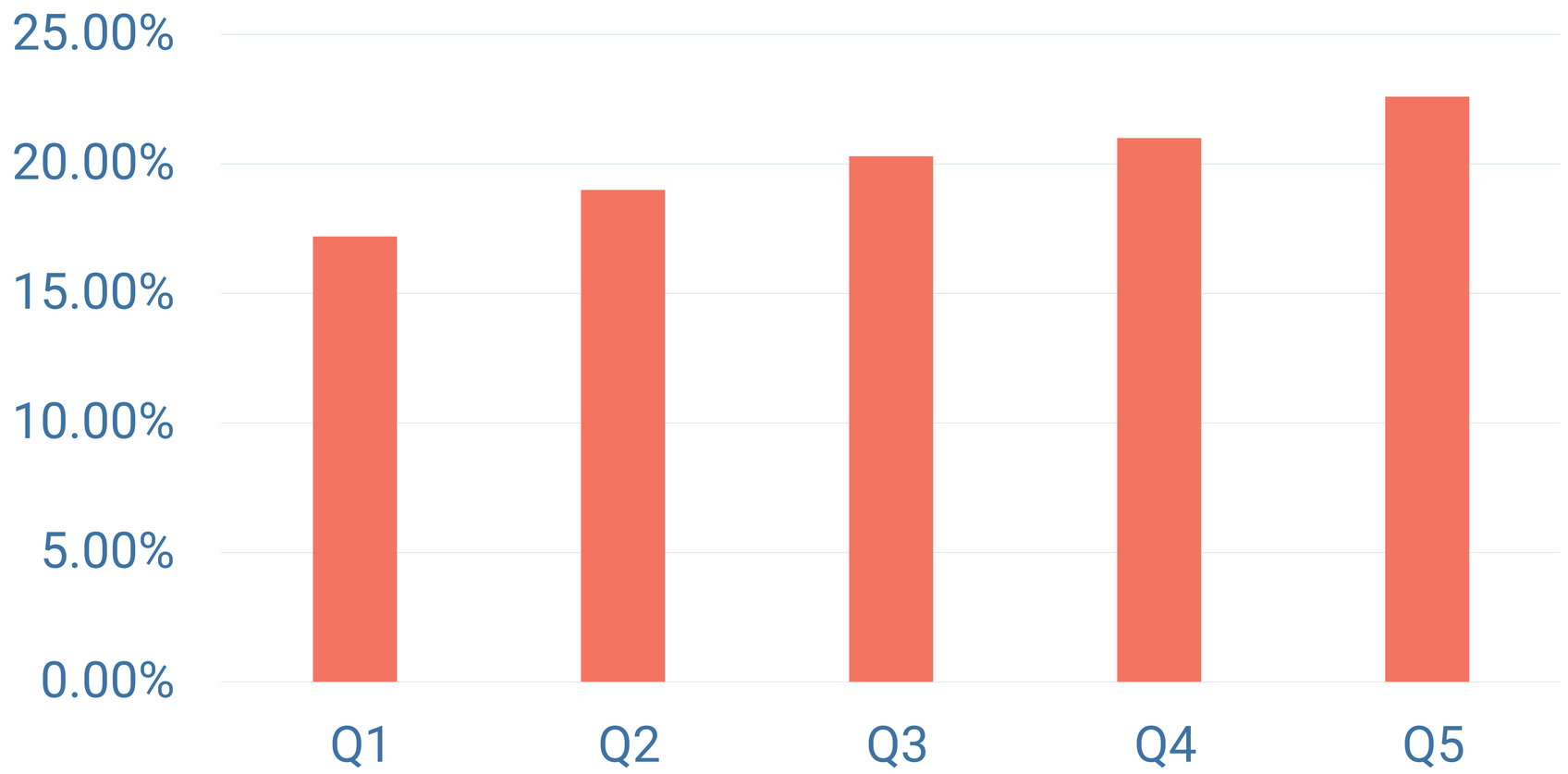
0.3% (170) increase since 2023

72.1% (24,425) increase since 2019

-

In 2024 represented 10.3% of acceptances - up from 6.3% in 2019 but down from 10.5% in 2023

THE PICTURE FOR LEVELS OF DISADVANTAGE



University of Essex

Supporting students to make informed choices about Foundation Years

Preparation steps and resources

- Visit! – Open Days and Offer Holder Days
- Contacting student support services ahead of time
- Preparation Programmes and resources
  - University Preparation Programme – supporting the application process
  - Essex Preparation Programme – supporting with study skills
  - Future Learn – study skills courses
  - Blackbullion – funding guidance for students
- Unibuddy

More debt? Making it affordable

Tuition Fees for foundation years are changing for October 2025:

- Classroom-based Foundation Years - £5,760
  - Fees will usually then increase in alignment with standard course fees for year 1

- All other Foundation Years - £9,535
  - This is the same fee as will be charged for their undergraduate degree

- If students are eligible for government funding support this can be used for Foundation Years too! – Tuition Fee Loan, Maintenance Loan, Grants, DSA, etc

Key Takeaway

Research is key!

Students should research foundation years in the same way they would for year 1 entry courses – they are not all the same!

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS