

## Further Investigation: The Delhi University Four Year Undergraduate Programme - Interim Report

Delhi University introduced the Four Year Undergraduate Programme (hereafter FYUP), referred to in the workshop reports, in 2013-14. A systemic change of this scale justified further investigation within our aim of understanding prospects for English Studies in India even though the FYUP was still so new and those involved were in differing degrees still working to understand the impact on the undergraduate programme as a whole in English Studies. The investigation parallels although it cannot replicate previous approaches. Thus paralleling the workshops we have met with a small number of those involved in teaching the courses, engaging in discussions in which we have drawn on their expertise and where we have allowed them to set the agenda. Separately paralleling the survey a short questionnaire was circulated to contacts and made available in various ways to Delhi University college teachers and others. The following section is based on those sources and the details of the FYUP available on the Delhi University website. The change to the FYUP has been very controversial in Delhi University and beyond, and has a national political dimension. It is said on the one hand that it was given significant impetus by the Ministry of Human Resources of the recent Congress led national government; the BJP has said in the run up to elections in 2014 that a government led by them would scrap the change. In that context it seems appropriate not to name our sources or quote them directly. Our interviewees' and respondents' comments are thus simply woven into the narrative that follows.

In essence the FYUP adds a 'foundation' year of study, comprising a common curriculum which all students study, to the existing three year programme. This common curriculum includes: eleven foundation courses; an applied language course (with choice based on the language policy in India); and a course 'integrating Mind, Body and Heart' based on the early life of Gandhi. In the first of the four years students study predominantly the common foundation curriculum but with a little special subject study. In the second special subject courses predominate but there are still some foundation course study. Special subject study then occupies the third and fourth year. A key aspect of the design is the introduction of multiple formal exit points: after year 2 (diploma); after year 3 (ordinary degree); after year 4 (honours degree). From a student perspective, after studying in an increasingly streamed way through years ten to twelve of school, the first year of college is 'destreamed' since all students take all subjects across a range from science to computing to business entrepreneurship to history and English. The University has also aimed for a common pedagogy across these courses: 'The teaching methodology in the Foundation courses is participative and project based. Reading material is pertinent, engaging and of manageable length for students. Presentations in class are mandatory. Evaluation procedures are recommended to ensure continuous learning'. The final and in some respects most important element in the design is the focus in the foundation courses on a series of themes, described as challenges facing modern India: 'Economic Development, Rural, Urban & Linkages; Energy, water; Urbanization, Infrastructure, Transport, Sanitation; Environment & Public Health; Food security, Agriculture; Education, Literacy; Ethics, Society & Justice'<sup>1</sup>.

The FYUP has been implemented with remarkable speed by Delhi University, something very unusual in a university where previous syllabus reform has often taken several years. There is a common acceptance that this has had an impact. Materials became available only very close to the beginning of the semester. Orientation courses were offered by the university but could only accommodate a sub set of teachers involved in the foundations courses, and further induction depended on effective cascading of information in colleges. In practice the cascading was patchy. The major source of first information for staff (and, we understand, students) was the newspaper reports. [Add references, e.g. [www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/NewDelhi/DU-V-C-calls-meeting-to-address-concerns-over-foundation-courses/Article1-1106747.aspx](http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/NewDelhi/DU-V-C-calls-meeting-to-address-concerns-over-foundation-courses/Article1-1106747.aspx) August 12 2013; [archive.indianexpress.com/news/vc-interacts-with-students-to-allay-fears-over-four-year-course/1155776/](http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/vc-interacts-with-students-to-allay-fears-over-four-year-course/1155776/) August 15 2013] Our respondents spoke also of: compromises being made in the

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<sup>1</sup> [fyup.du.ac.in/FC.html](http://fyup.du.ac.in/FC.html) accessed 09.04.14

level of study to allow a subject to be accessible to all; mechanical treatment of themes; difficulties in ensuring the integrity of the grading of projects; particular problems with 'Integrating Mind, Body and Heart. It seems also that colleges varied in the degree to which they saw the materials created by the university as necessarily to be followed or able to be adapted the materials. The university for its part has established what was referred to by some as an FYUP 'squad' which was visiting colleges unannounced and meeting students (but not staff) to gather information which might enable some revisions of the courses in the future.

Drawing even necessarily tentative conclusions about the way the FYUP would have an impact on the prospects for English Studies seems difficult. More than one person agreed that in general terms the current changes focus essentially on the new first and second years and leave specialist honours discipline study untouched within the overall four year structure. Others however suggested that specialist English study was being squeezed, and this seems certainly possible in the first year of implementation of the FYUP when the four discipline courses are alongside ten foundation, applied or IMBH courses. Key to this issue seems likely to be the extent to which teachers and students see the Language, Literature and Creativity 2 course as an English course or a general foundation course. The low proportion of texts regarded as canonical and a degree of similarity between LLC2 and the previous 'add-on' paid for English proficiency course are evidence for some that this is nominally and substantially part of the general curriculum and not the English syllabus.

A number of participants in our previous discussions commented that for many English students command of English was an obstacle in their studies, notwithstanding the focus on English in school level education. It would seem that bringing LLC2 within the BA curriculum (where it will not require additional payment) should help. However it was said that this course on its own would still not be enough and that accepting a loss of some breadth in the foundation level curriculum to allow greater focus on language skills would have been advantageous overall. It was suggested, in this context that the paid for English proficiency course was likely to survive by popular demand.

There seems no publicly available policy document setting out the underpinning drive for the FYUP. A number of possibilities are put forward. The four year element is seen as aligning Delhi University structures with US structures, making it easier for Delhi University qualifications to be understood and recognised there. The addition of different exit points is seen as a parallel motivation. Being able to leave with a formal diploma qualification after two years of relatively general education is seen as valuable for students especially from less advantaged backgrounds, especially if coupled with the more or less automatic right of return later in life to top-up that qualification. The FYUP is also seen by some as a response to the often cited claim by Indian industrialist and entrepreneurs that Indian graduates are unemployable<sup>2</sup>. A further underlying motive is to increase what might be described as the civic awareness of students; the foundation courses are in this context an important generalist intervention between the increasing specialism of school work and the specialism of degree work.

The latter two of these rationales is relevant to our previous discussions of prospects for English Studies. Will, that is to say, the introduction of the FYUP lead to English Studies being perceived as attractive because it produced graduates with the skills required for employment. At this stage of

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<sup>2</sup> The claim is often not clearly documented, but see, for example,

(a) ASHE 2013 Annual Status of Higher Education of States and UTs in India pp.18-19

[www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-](http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-)

[India/Local%20Assets/Documents/Thoughtware/AnnualStatusofHigherEducationofStatesandUTsinIndia,%202013.pdf](http://India/Local%20Assets/Documents/Thoughtware/AnnualStatusofHigherEducationofStatesandUTsinIndia,%202013.pdf)

(b)

[www.aspiringminds.in/press\\_doc/47\\_graduates\\_in\\_india\\_are\\_unemployable\\_for\\_any\\_job\\_aspiring\\_minds\\_national\\_employability\\_report\\_graduates.pdf](http://www.aspiringminds.in/press_doc/47_graduates_in_india_are_unemployable_for_any_job_aspiring_minds_national_employability_report_graduates.pdf)

the development of the FYUP English Studies, this seems unlikely. Allowing, for a moment, that the foundation courses will increase the range of a student's study experience, that experience will have been at what most felt was largely sub-university level and by the time of graduation would be three to four years in the past. The pedagogy foundation courses is also said by the university to represent a challenge to current practice in a way that is relevant here. Group work, project work and presentations are all said to be valuable in terms of employability. However it was said that any good intention in this area was in most colleges cancelled out by practicalities. Thus classrooms were not suited to group work. Class sizes which seemed to be anything between 40 and 100 meant that even ten minute individual presentations were impractical. Students were moreover cultured into a focus on examinations and assessment. Thus once they had received their grade for a project they had no interest in anything beyond the examination; since this is not based on the book classes were skipped.

An analogous conclusion seems appropriate on the basis of our investigations in relation to the possibility that the FYUP will create a cadre of graduates who are less bound by subject specialism. Those for whom this might be true, particularly those who complete a diploma, are likely to be seen as not having addressed issues at a sub-degree level. Those who complete a full four years, meantime will have an apparently more balanced study experience, with the specialist courses roughly balanced by the foundation courses, the DC II courses [what about the IBMH and cultural awareness courses? Are they all new?] But at present the main element in the honours degree is still likely to be seen to be the subject expertise, since no suggestion seems to have been made that these latter should be more inflected by the kind of themes found in the foundation courses.

To conclude the main discussion it is worth considering one of the key findings of the previous stages of our investigation into relation with the new findings from the first year of FYUP. The evidence of our survey, supported by the testimony of teachers, indicates strongly that students opt for English degrees for two parallel but intimately connected reasons. First they want to enhance their command of English, but second they wish to do this in a literary context. This linkage is explained partly by the fact that students enjoy the study of literature but also that study of literature and the cultural context it provides gives them valuable cultural capital. One provisional conclusion here is that the current approaches and structuring of English Studies do not take this complex combination of student motivation into account in the student experience. Will the FYUP offer an advantage here? The evidence seemed to lead to the conclusion 'not as yet'. The evidence about the speed of implementation is again relevant perhaps. Implementation was done through a series of 'empowered committees', but it seems plain that this empowerment was extremely confined by time, by decisions about common elements that were made by fiat at university level. Empowerment, such as it was, could only extend to years one and two of the FYUP and not to the overall programme or - in English and perhaps other subjects also - a mix of learning outcomes appropriate to each level and to study experience that matches students expectations.

As almost an addendum occasional reference was made to the implications of the FYUP for postgraduate study, and particularly the possibility of a reduction of the length of required study from two years to one. Any changes appear still in the future; in an interview with the *Times of India* the Vice-Chancellor referred to change in 2015/16. Two possibilities seem envisaged. First there is the possibility of a new kind of interdisciplinary programme. Second, and more relevant for an enquiry into Prospects for English Studies is the possibility sketched by the Vice Chancellor for the *Times*. He indicated a wish to move from a debate in terms of a 'one year or two year' MA to a 'credit based' MA. In the latter framework students 'are required to have a certain number of credits. If you are coming from Delhi (university) system, the requirements of credits will be much less in masters' programme than for someone coming from another system. The expectation is that

a DU student will be able to gain the credits in about a year's time'<sup>3</sup>. It would be dangerous to come to a firm conclusion on such an indication but this would seem to hint at significant change either to the final year of the FYUP in English or the current two year MA in English. On the one hand it might suggest an accelerated accumulation of credit within the year. On the other hand it might be suggested that a student completing the FYUP would have achieved some or all of the requirements currently tested by the progression from year 1 to year 2 in the MA programme, and would accordingly be countable towards the MA award. Both possibilities seem problematic, but further information is required before any firmer conclusions are reached.

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<sup>3</sup> [timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/news/Complete-DU-post-graduation-in-one-year-from-2015/articleshow/32329163.cms](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/education/news/Complete-DU-post-graduation-in-one-year-from-2015/articleshow/32329163.cms) accessed 14.04.14