

# Foundation Years in SBS: Providing a fair shot' (or not) for students

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*Making a difference*



**SINCE 1824**





# Biosciences Foundation Year at Manchester

## Biosciences with a Foundation Year

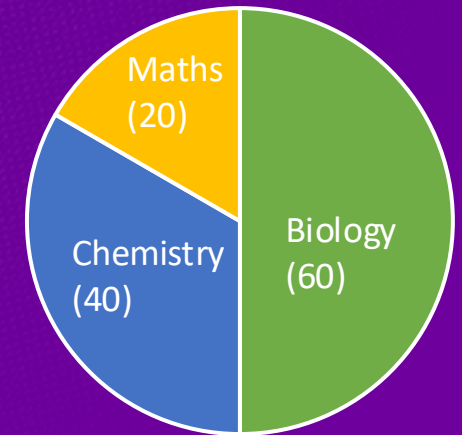
Our foundation year will pave the way for entry to one of our biosciences degree courses for students who do not have the right qualifications.







# Current Curriculum



## Semester 1

Course Unit
Molecules Cells, and Variation
Microbes, and Disease
Chemistry 1
Mathematics 1

## Semester 2

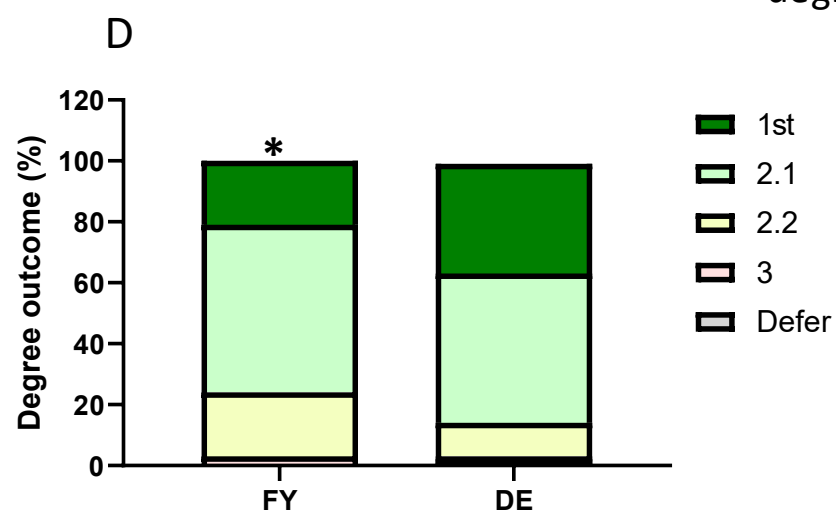
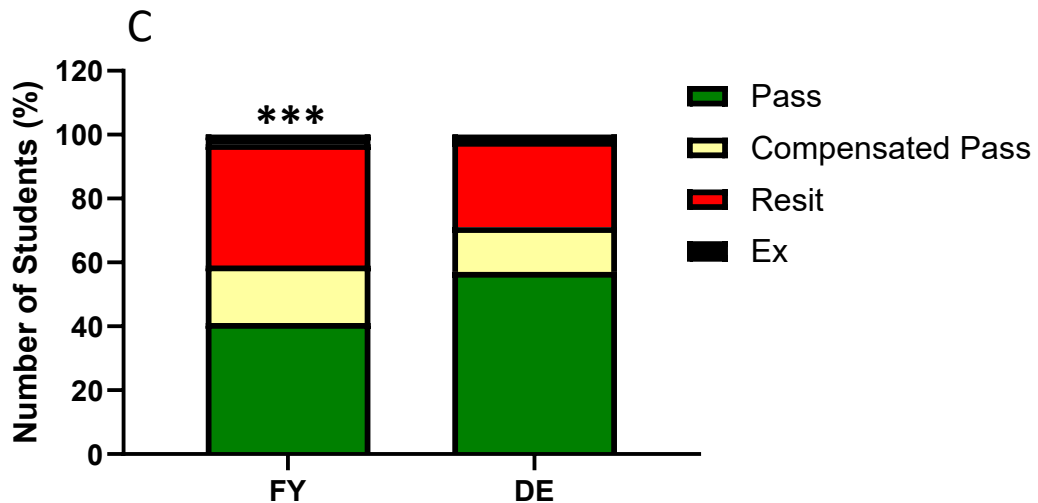
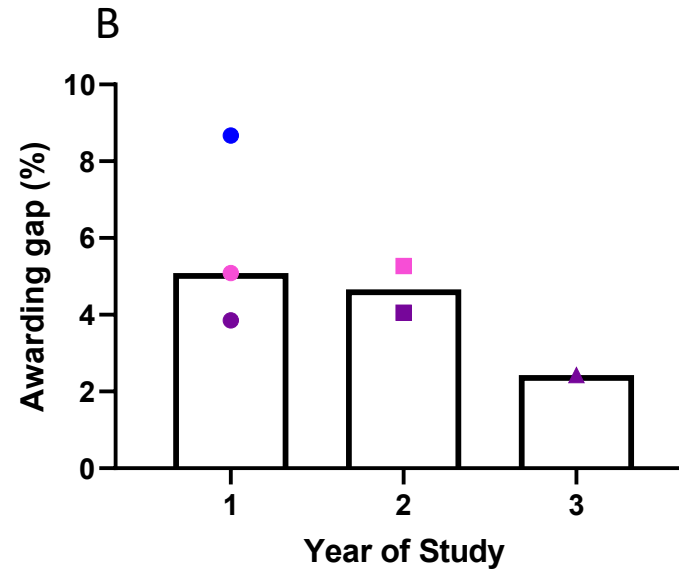
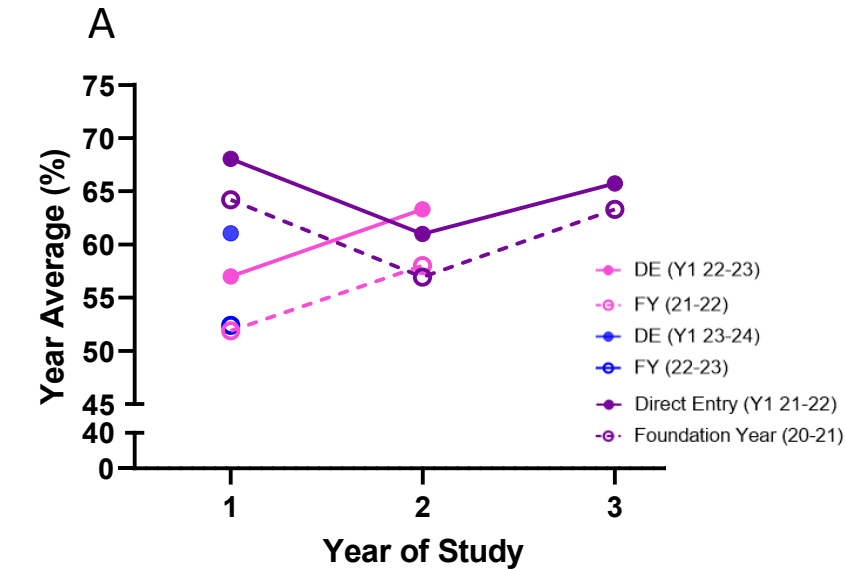
Course Unit
Physiology
Energy and the Environment
Chemistry 2
Mathematics 2

Method of Assessment
Examination at end of second semester (80%)Progress test during second semester (10%) Coursework (10%)
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Examination at end of the second semester (80%)Progress test during first semester (20%)

Credit Rating
15
15
20
10

All students complete all modules and must meet the pass threshold of 22 points to progress into Y1

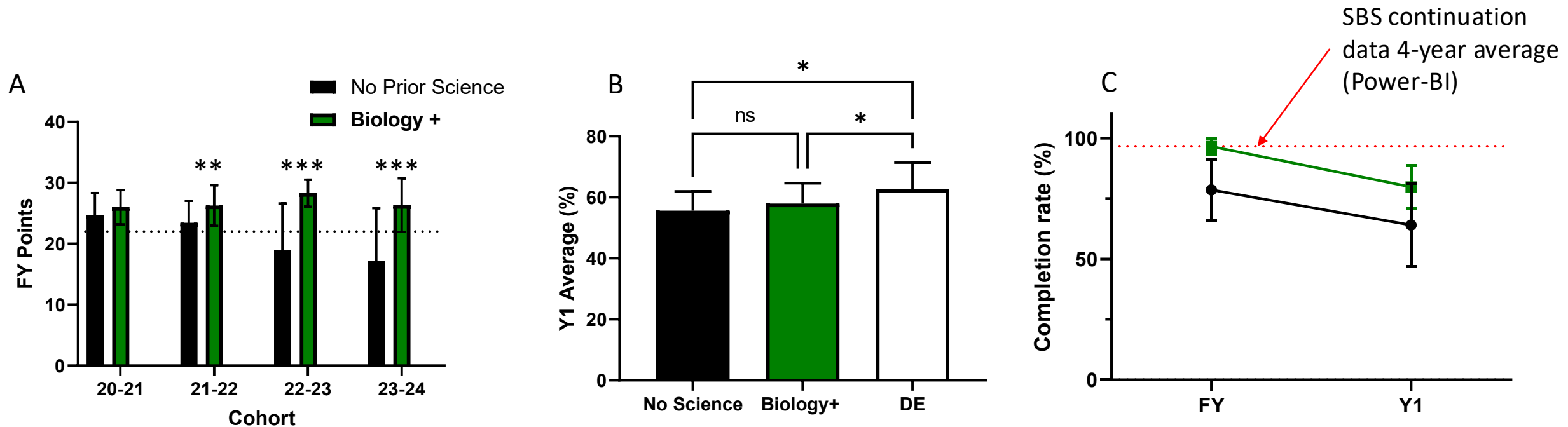
# Differential attainment in FY



- 3 matched cohorts FY start in 20-21, 21-22 and 22-23 academic years
- Students completing BSc Degrees in SBS
- Awarding gaps most pronounced in Y1 but persist throughout the degree
- Data from 23-24: Y1 - fewer passed units and increased number of fails. Y3 - Lower proportion of 1<sup>st</sup> class marks awarded, lower proportion of 'good degree awards

# Role of educational background

(A-level Biology at entry predominant predictor of performance)



- A) In Foundation Year those without prior knowledge of biology perform more poorly, with significantly lower FY marks and progression rates (Pass rate: No Prior Science = 77.8% vs Biology+ = 96.8%, 20-21 Cohorts onwards)
- B) Y1 average marks (23-24)
- C) Continuation rates for FY students are lower than DE students (Red hashed line)





# Understanding and addressing these awarding gaps

## Project aims:

- To better understand Foundation Year student experiences.
- To understand any challenges FY students face in transitioning to HE study. To understand any barriers to success
- To consider whether our current curriculum is meeting the needs of students



Student Consultation

Programme Review





# Student Consultation

- Student Surveys and Student Voice Feedback
  - Examined for common themes (general overview of the course)
- Student Focus Groups
  - Co-facilitated by SBS IAG team and Student Partners
  - April 2024 & March 2025 (to review 24-25 teaching)

## Belonging/Student satisfaction

- Lack of 'sense of belonging'
- Not feeling like a University student
- Burnout/overwhelm

## Academic issues

- Volume of content – too much
- More support/help with academic skills
- More time on campus





# Updated academic skills provision 2024-2025

## New online Resources

### Academic Skills

Build Content ▾ Assessments ▾ Tools ▾ Partner Content ▾

#### Introduction

This online course has been designed to help you develop your academic skills to enable you to

- Developing your study skills
- Writing and referencing skills
- Digital skills and technologies

On successful completion of this unit you will be better placed to identify your personal goals for through all the content.

#### Developing your study skills

A curated set of resources from the University of Manchester Library team to support your

#### Writing and Referencing Skills

Enabled: Statistics Tracking

The modules included in this folder will form a compulsory part of your Y1 studies and you will find them relevant to your learning and for your semester 1 essay assignment.

#### Digital skills and technologies

#### Planning for a successful degree

Whilst this unit is self-taught and self-paced we have

The [University of Manchester Library](#) is your one stop shop to get you started. Further information is provided at the end of the unit.

September- [Getting started with the Library](#): This module provides access to further support from the library team.

October- [Strategies for effective learning](#): This module provides a learning journey, to help you decide which tips and strategies to use.

November - [Achieving your academic goals](#): So you can plan your Foundation Year and progressing onto your chosen degree.

December - [Revision Strategies](#): As we approach the end of the year, create an effective revision plan and highlight key points.

#### Time management and wellbeing

[Managing your time effectively](#): We all struggle with time management.

[Now or never? Strategies for dealing with procrastination](#)

[Now or never? Understanding the procrastination cycle](#)

#### MODULE 0: Academic Malpractice

This learning module has been designed to raise your awareness of Academic Malpractice. **Driving Test**. to test your understanding of this material. You will need to pass this test to continue your work during the rest of your programme.

The mark for the Driving test assessment does NOT contribute to your final mark.

#### Module 1 - Essential Language Skills

This learning module goes back to the essentials. It provides a foundation for the rest of the programme.

#### Module 2 - Academic Style

Writing in an academic style is different from general writing. This module provides the tools you need to complete the assessment.

#### Module 3 - Text Handling

Writing sentences should be easy; structuring a whole essay is a different matter.

#### Module 4 - Referencing The Right Way

Referencing in academic writing can be confusing, and misusing references can lead to academic malpractice.





# Updated academic skills provision 2024-2025

## In person support

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### Plenary Sessions:

- 1) Making the most of your Foundation Year (in collaboration with the Library team)
- 2) Understanding University Assessments (incorporating peer review and active self-feedback)

### Small Group tutorials:

8 sessions per semester, **2 more than previous years**

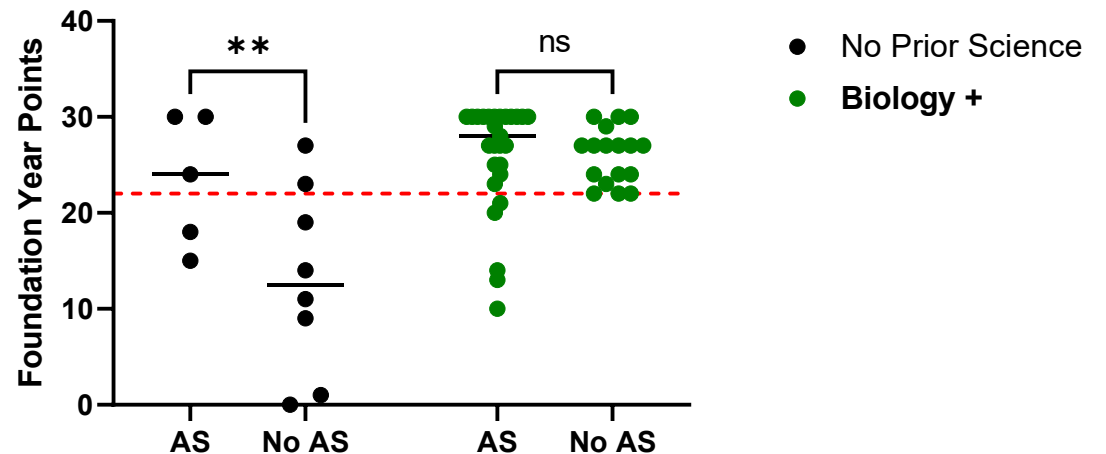
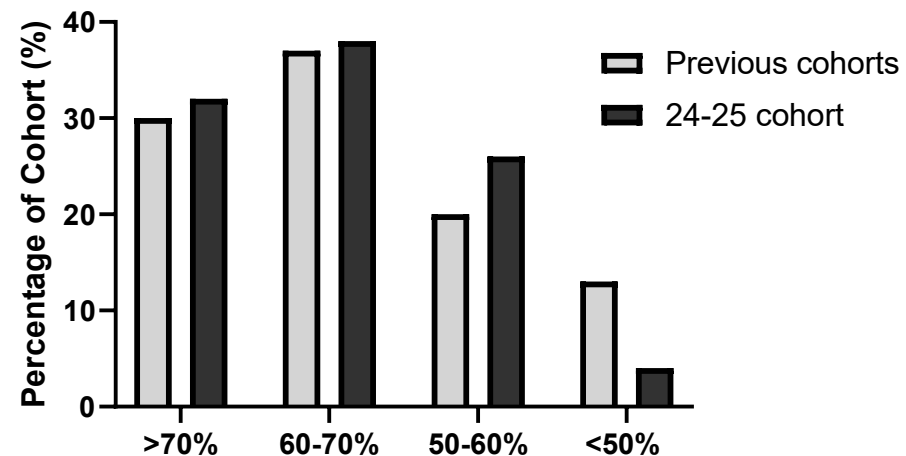
Output: Summative Semester 1 essay: 40% BIOL10900 unit mark

# Evaluation of academic skills initiatives

**Engagement:** Of a cohort of 57 students, 29 (51%) completed the Writing and referencing skills component of the academic skills module. >85% attendance at plenary sessions.

## Performance:

- No improvement in mean essay grades compared to previous years, or between those who did/did not engage with academic skills modules. Slight shift in mark distribution (A)/
- No improvement in essay marks but slight improvement in Foundation year marks for those without prior science background, who engaged with academic skills (B.)

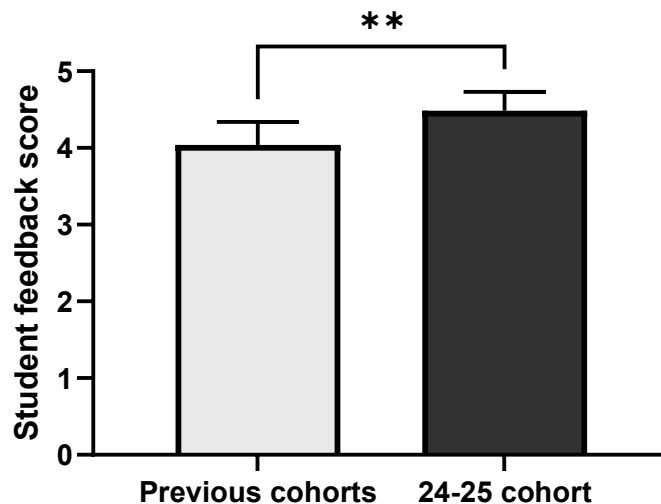




# Student Feedback

**End of unit survey** (response rate 62%):

- 59% of students specifically mentioned academic skills as the most useful aspect of the unit
- Overall unit feedback scores increased



## Student Focus group

- Only attended academic skills plenary sessions as it was timetabled directly after a compulsory session
- Somewhat useful, but **not a priority** compared to other classes (essay doesn't really count)
- Students are **balancing benefit** of the session with cost/time of coming to campus
- Online resources and peer feedback activity **hard to access** (on mobile devices)
- **In person content** was preferred for helping with the essay compared to the online resources
- Peer feedback helped with assignment



# Programme/Curriculum Review

- In consultation with: Y1 unit co-ordinators, SBS assessment and curriculum leads and Xaverian teaching staff, critically reviewed what we teach in FY vs what students need to know as a prerequisite for Y1 study
- BIOL10900 to become a 10 credit unit
- Remove 10 credits of Xaverian content
- Restructure course into core semester 1 with optional units in semester 2

## SEMESTER 1

All students must study the following units:

Unit code	Unit Name	Number of credits
BIOL10900	Foundation Year Academic Skills (University Taught Component)	10 (spans both semesters)
XABY01	Fundamental Principles of Biology 1	15
XABY02	Fundamental Principles of Biology 2	15
XACH01	Fundamental Principles of Chemistry	20
XAMA01	Mathematics 1	10

## SEMESTER 2

Students must choose **4 out of the following 6 options**:

Unit code	Unit Name	Number of credits
XABY03	Microbiology and Immunology	10
XABY04	Genetics and Diversity	10
XABY05	Physiology	10
XABY06	Ecology	10
XACH02	Organic Chemistry	10
XACH03	Biological Chemistry	10





## Next steps



- Refine academic skills content – lessons learnt
- Explore further student support thorough academic advising and peer mentoring
- Evaluate impact and student experience of the new curriculum

# Thank you!

Want to chat? Please reach out!

Email:

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or message me on Teams.