Kingston University London

Exploring the role of university timetabling on retention and attendance rates of mature and BME students

Joseph Dillon-Hearne (student) & Hansa Jadva-Patel(Associate Professor)

Background

In 2010 the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) visited Kingston University to perform an institutional audit; within their report they identified "timetabling as a limiting factor" and that the university "intends to implement a new system for timetabling in the next two years" (QAA 2011). Following on from this, Kingston University has implemented a variety of changes within its timetabling system, the latest of which being a new centralised system which was instigated within the 2014-15 academic year.

The aim of this research project is to examine the impact of the new timetabling program on students, how individual departments provide timetabling help for their students, and to examine to what extent these issues have impacted on student retention and progression. By focusing on both mature and BME student goups we hope to examine the effect of timetabling on possibly a vulnerable group of students, and by exploring their experiences we hope to be able to draw wider recommendations that are applicable to all students. From our own experiences we have noted that departments currently use a variety of timetabling methods to compliment the new centralised system. This may leave students with multiple websites and sources that need checking before their timetable can be confirmed. We aim to explore the extent to which these problems are widespread within the university and what impact it has on student experiences.

Why focus on mature and BME students?

We will target all the students from which the data pertaining to BME and mature students will be extracted as anecdotally, we feel these subgroups may experience greater disruptions which may impact on progression and retention. We hope to explore mechanisms used to overcome and address any inconveniences, and the extent to which university timetabling impacts on their everyday lives. By looking at groups of students where the issues are perhaps most magnified we hope to be able to draw conclusions which will be applicable to a wider student audience.

Mature students are more likely to have obligations outside of university (such as family commitments, children, jobs etc) and thus we theorise rely on the university timetabling to plan their lives more than most. Positive and negative timetabling issues are thus likely to have an impact on this group.

What will the study involve?

We will be conducting two focus groups in the next month in order to explore students views on timetabling, We aim to have a vareiy of students from differing backgrounds in these groups and will then transcribe and analyse the data we collect. This data will form the basis for our final report which we hope the university may utilise as guidance for future timetabling developments.

How will the project be disseminated?

We hope to sustain the project by reporting the findings where potentially future practice can be informed, including Kingston University's festival of learning, education committee, and final student presentation.

Figure 1: Graph of Overall Universit Ethnic Profile, taken from Kingston University 2015/6

White ■ Asian ■ Black ■ Other ■ Refused

46%, 28%, 16%, 8%, 2%

Aged under 18 ■ Aged 18-21 ■ Aged 22-25 ■ aged 25+

53.4%, 23.2%, 23.3%, 0.2%

Age on Entry

Figure 2: Graph of age of Student entry to Kingston University 2015/6

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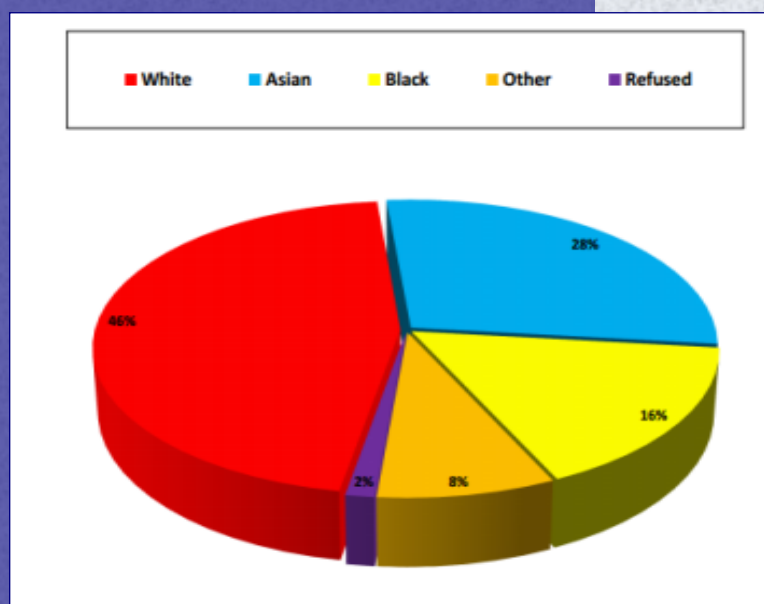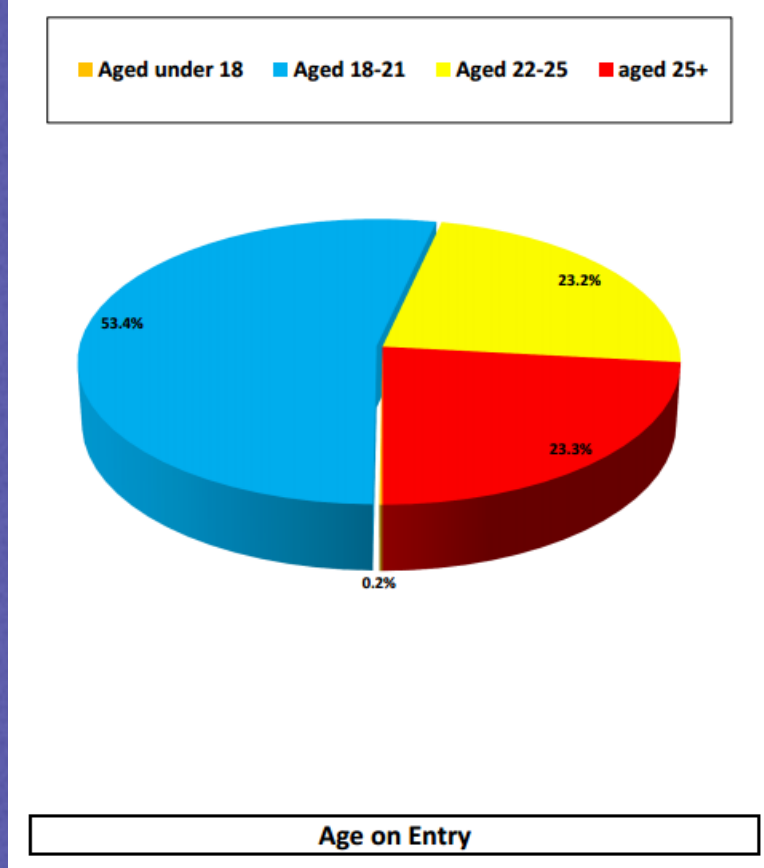
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