PLACING THE STUDENT AT THE HEART OF HIGHER EDUCATION

THE IMPORTANCE OF TIMETABLELING AND RESOURCE SCHEDULING IN THE FEE-PAYING ERA

Key Findings from Scientia’s analysis of 10 years of UK National Student Survey Data.
INTRODUCTION

Since the introduction of student fees in 1998, higher education has become an increasingly commercial entity. From 2017, some UK students will spend in excess of £9,000 a year on tuition fees. This makes it imperative for institutions to rank student satisfaction alongside academic excellence to ensure future success in both attracting and retaining their ‘customers’.

By analysing the results of the Higher Education Funding Council for England’s (HEFCE) National Student Survey from the past ten years, Scientia, a leading provider of timetabling and resource scheduling for higher education, has uncovered four key findings that relate to the success of universities.

Analysis of the data has shown that excellent organisation and management of university courses is essential to their success, and that Scientia’s institutions are performing well in these areas; seven of the top-ten-performing institutions in the Organisation and Management category are Scientia's clients.

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1 The National Student Survey is the yearly bellwether report on what students think. For the past 11 years, students have been asked the same 21 questions and this year over 300,000 responded. The results are a true reflection of the relative standards between UK institutions, the data not being weighted by academic output or entrance requirements.

Scientia has uncovered four key findings that relate to the success of universities.
Satisfaction with organisation and management of university courses is improving.

Performance improves when a successful timetabling and resource scheduling system is implemented; Scientia’s institutions come out on top in the National Student Survey.

Organisation satisfaction varies across the country.

Organisation satisfaction varies between subjects.

It is important to understand students’ needs, and Scientia’s research indicates that getting organisation, timetabling and resource scheduling right should be a top priority for universities.
KEY FINDING 1 – SATISFACTION WITH THE ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT OF UNIVERSITY COURSES IS IMPROVING

In line with the challenges faced by universities in the new consumer-focussed era, universities are seeking to improve their satisfaction scores by updating and improving their education administration systems. Scientia provides solutions including Enterprise Foundation – its core timetabling suite – and resource-booking software to help improve academic timetabling and resource scheduling. Solutions such as these mean that, in the past five years, university students who strongly agree their course is well managed and organised has increased by five percent.

The cornerstone of a well organised course is an optimised timetable. Over three quarters of students responding to the survey agree that their timetable is working efficiently and 42% strongly agree with the statement. This has consistently risen over past five years as institutions improve their timetabling methods.

81% of students agree that their “timetable works efficiently”, and 42% strongly agree.
Students of today are more connected than they have ever been, either via laptops or tablets in lectures, or using their smartphones. It follows therefore that it should now be easier than ever to communicate with students and indeed, 78% of students agree that changes to their course or teaching are communicated effectively. 40% of students strongly agree with the statement. With solutions such as Scientia Publish available, there is no reason why students should not be instantly informed if a lecture has been moved or a classroom session has been cancelled.

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KEY FINDING 2 – SCIENTIA’S CLIENTS COME OUT ON TOP IN THE NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

Scientia’s clients dominate the top positions in the 2016 National Student Survey. In the list of institutions scoring a student satisfaction level of over 90%, Scientia’s clients made up 54% of the list. They reported an overall improved satisfaction level compared to their peers at universities that do not use Scientia’s solutions.

Scientia’s clients dominate the top positions in the 2016 National Student Survey.
Aberystwyth, a Scientia client, charted the second-biggest improvement this year reaching the Top 10 with an overall satisfaction score of 92% - up 9% from 2015. Jackie Sayce, Institute Manager at Aberystwyth, said: “Successful Timetabling has played an important part in improving the student experience.”

Looking specifically at the Organisation and Management questions over 10 years, we are happy to report that 7 of the top 10 positions are filled by Scientia clients.

"Successful Timetabling has played an important part in improving the student experience.”

- Jackie Sayce, Institute Manager at Aberystwyth
It is clear that proper timetabling and resource scheduling is key to student satisfaction.

How much of our institutions’ success can we attribute to the organisation and management of the courses – something our solutions directly influence?

Student satisfaction, performance and retention all improve when a successful timetabling system is implemented, and this is demonstrated in the National Student Survey.

The success at Newcastle University is a clear example of this. After upgrading its systems and implementing a range of Scientia applications including Enterprise Foundation, Exam Scheduler, Web Room Booking and Enterprise Activity Adjuster, the University’s management of its time, space and equipment improved significantly. Around 85% of room bookings within the University are now done via the self-service method, dramatically reducing the burden on administrative staff, and with a centralised scheduling process, the University is benefiting from a consistent approach across all its Schools and Faculties: better data in, better timetables out. Newcastle University has also achieved a very strong standing in the National Student Survey.

Andy Roberts, Timetable Services Manager at Newcastle, said: “The upgraded software is evolving well to account for our specific needs. Now, we’re able to produce individual student timetables and use the data extracted from Syllabus Plus to inform other applications, such as our integrated student attendance monitoring system and lecture and event recording service.”

At the University of Hertfordshire, Scientia has worked with the central support team to identify areas for greater efficiency and capacity across the university, improving the system as much as possible to make timetabler’s jobs easier. The number of complaints made about timetables have dropped to virtually zero, and Penny Charlish-Jackson, Head of Operations and Customer Service at the University of Hertfordshire, is confident that “while we are still in the process of fine-tuning the software, we expect vast improvements for the 2016/17 timetable.”

“We expect vast improvements for the 2016/17 timetable.”
- Penny Charlish-Jackson, Head of Operations and Customer Service at the University of Hertfordshire
KEY FINDING 3 – ORGANISATION SATISFACTION VARIES HUGELY ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Northern Ireland led the way with their organisation and management results, whereas universities based in London still have work to do to match student satisfaction in other regions.

London’s organisational challenges may be increased because universities based in the capital tend to have split campuses, limited spare capacity for room scheduling as well as the fact that lecturers and students alike have to commute to and between the sites.

In the North West, universities are likewise split across the urban regions of Merseyside and Greater Manchester with similar complexities. At the other end of the spectrum, the East Midlands universities such as the University of Nottingham have a sizeable campus with good transport links.
KEY FINDING 4 – ORGANISATION LEVELS VARY HUGELY BETWEEN SUBJECTS

Which would be considered the best organised and managed subjects? It may surprise you that students tell us that history and philosophy subjects come out on top in this area and that business is middle of the pack.

Traditionally, faculties had a number of rooms allocated to them and they controlled their own timetable. This results in inefficiencies due to lack of visibility of potentially available space to other departments, and repetition of the timetabling process. By helping institutions to transition to a centralised timetabling process, Scientia can create a single clash-free timetable for an entire university which optimises use of space, time and equipment.

Subjects with complicated and varied schedules such as medicine will benefit the most from a centralised timetabling approach. The School of Health Sciences at City, University of London, for instance, has seen a dramatic improvement in its ability to organise complex schedules after adopting Scientia’s centralised timetabling system and extending it to their Nursing and Midwifery departments. Resources are more efficiently organised and staff now have the entire year’s timetable in advance.

“Enterprise Foundation has transformed processes and scheduling within the nursing and midwifery departments.”
- Paul Sweetman, Space Systems Manager, City, University of London
THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND PUTTING THE STUDENT FIRST

As tuition fees have increased over the years, universities have had to work harder to make the expense of an undergraduate degree worthwhile. In the student-as-a-consumer age, customer satisfaction counts. Scientia understands this and works with its clients to deliver student-focussed solutions – with excellent results.

The commercialisation of the higher education sector presents institutions with unique challenges. Student satisfaction is crucial in increasing the profile of universities nationally and globally, with excellent organisation and management being key to this. Through analysis of the National Student Survey, Scientia has found that their clients score consistently well in both overall student satisfaction and satisfaction with the organisation and management of their courses. Student satisfaction levels continue to rise as universities realise and understand the importance of organisation, management and access to resources, with Scientia providing clear solutions to these problems.

A 2015 report from professional services firm Deloitte\(^1\) highlighted the key areas in which universities should seek to improve. One important area was the demand and need for new technologies, specifically ones that centralise and streamline administrative processes. Similarly, a report in the International Review of Economics Education\(^2\) highlighted that students are happier and more successful when they are satisfied with the resources available to them and their learning environment.

Scientia is leading the way with its innovative timetabling and resource management systems, giving its clients the latest technologies and solutions to ensure future success.

\(^1\) http://tinyurl.com/DeloitteHEreport  
\(^2\) https://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/iree/i4/chan.htm

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ABOUT SCIENTIA

Established in 1989, Scientia is the established market leader in timetabling and resource scheduling software for the higher education sector worldwide. We focus exclusively on providing state-of-the-art solutions for the problems faced by institutions in optimising their most valuable assets: time, space and equipment. With our support, institutions worldwide exceed their strategic goals, such as enhancing student and staff satisfaction and improving space utilisation.

Scientia’s solutions are used in more than 450 institutions in 34 countries over 6 continents, reaching millions of students every year. Enterprise Foundation, our core timetabling suite, is available in 17 languages.

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