

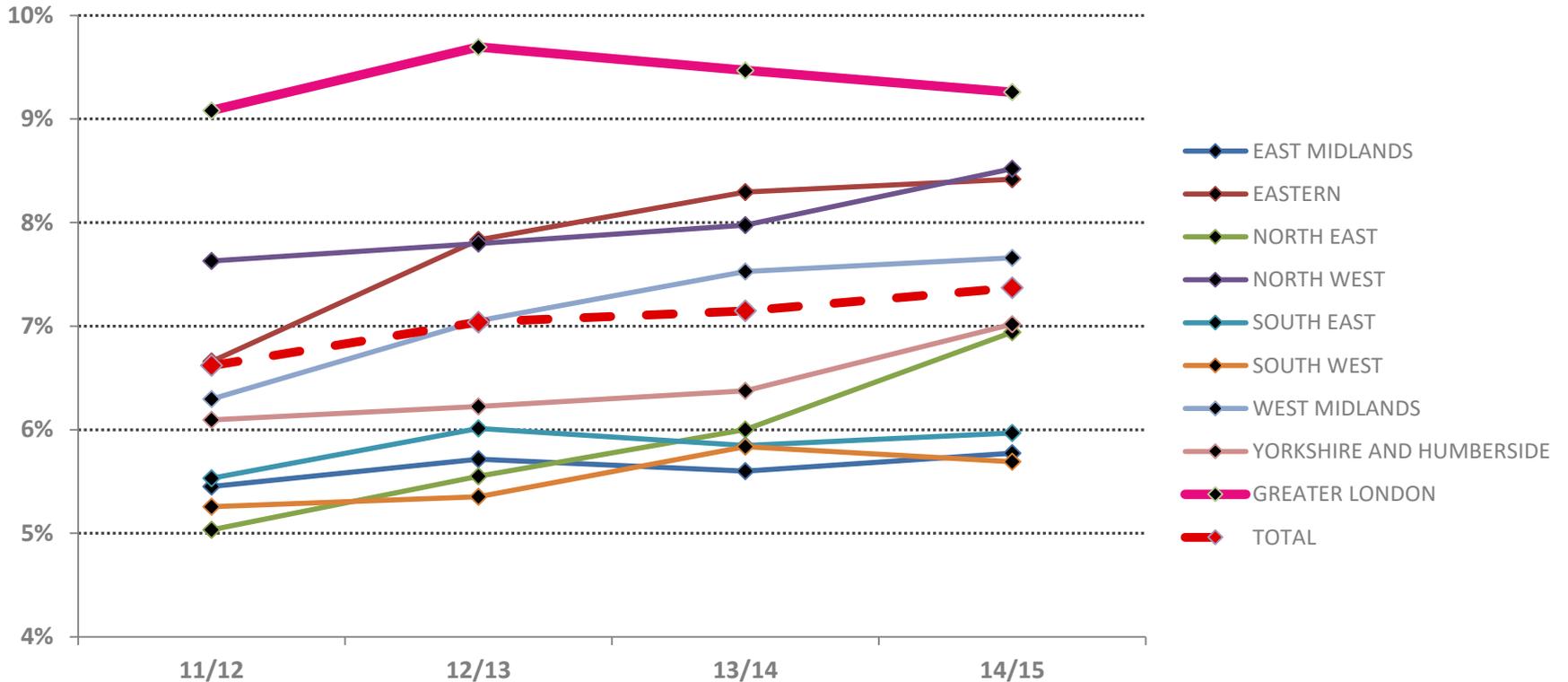
Student retention at university

The Social Market Foundation

Why worry about student retention?

- Participation rates at university have grown remarkably in past decades
- There has been significant attention on widening the pool of applicants to and enrolments in university, but less focus on whether those that attend stay on
- Teaching Excellence Framework may raise this up the agenda.
- Those from specific demographic groups may be more likely to drop out. This is an important social mobility agenda.

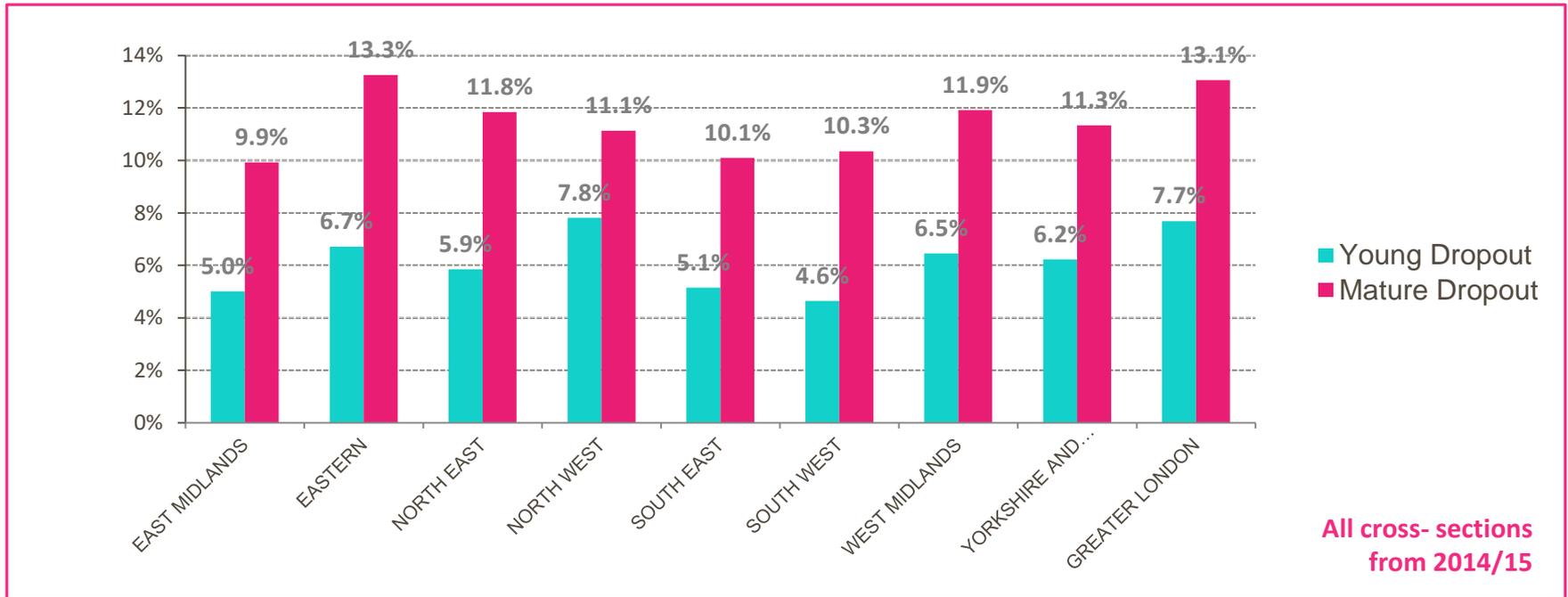
Proportion of UK-domiciled students that drop out of higher education by end of first year



- The difference in dropout rates between London and the rest of the country is much less pronounced than two years ago.
- However, the region is still performing poorly.

Significant differences between younger and older students

Proportion of UK-domiciled students that drop out of higher education by end of first year



- Mature first-degree entrants have significantly worse retention rates than their young counterparts in all regions of England. Mature is defined by HESA as aged 21 or over on September 30th on the year of entrance.
- There is imperfect correlation between the retention rates of the two groups regionally. The factors influencing their dropout rates are likely to be different.
- Our analysis focuses premodinantly on young students.

A sense of belonging

- Building relationships with other students and academic staff; feeling that the institution is suited to your needs

Engagement

- Participating in lectures, tutorials and extra-curricular groups

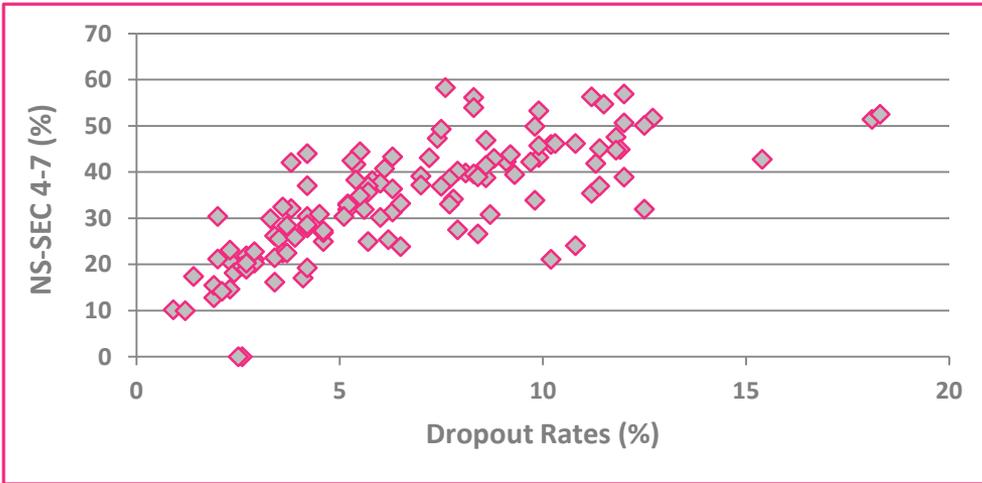
Financial Constraints

- Being able to afford the costs of living, the costs of study material and of socialising and participating in university life

Examples of how such factors may be manifested

- Those from poorer backgrounds, or ethnic minorities, may find it more difficult to engage with their studies (differences in culture, attitudes).
- Poorer students may also find it difficult to afford the necessities.
- Those living further from university, and especially not in halls or on campus, may find it more difficult to engage in student life generally.

Relationship between socio-economic score and drop-out rates



- NS-SEC 4-7 is a measure of whether a student’s parents are / were in specific occupations (including routine jobs, lower supervisory roles and small employers) indicative of a lower socioeconomic class. There is high correlation between the proportion of student’s who fall into this group at a university and dropout rates.

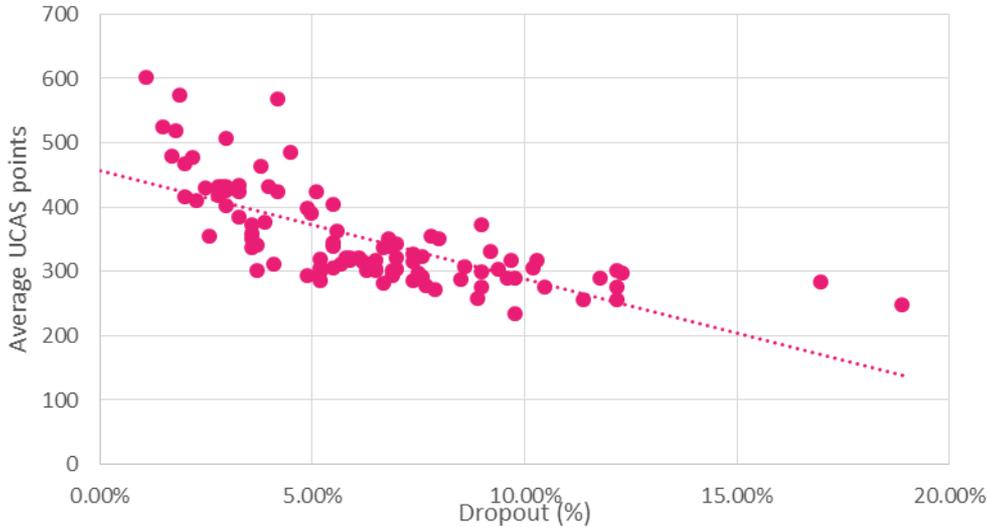
- London’s rate of students whose parents are classed as NS-SEC 4-7 is around the median for universities. The capital’s figure (35%) is much lower than the West Midlands’ 41%.

Socioeconomic background by region (NS-SEC 4-7)



Prior attainment of students

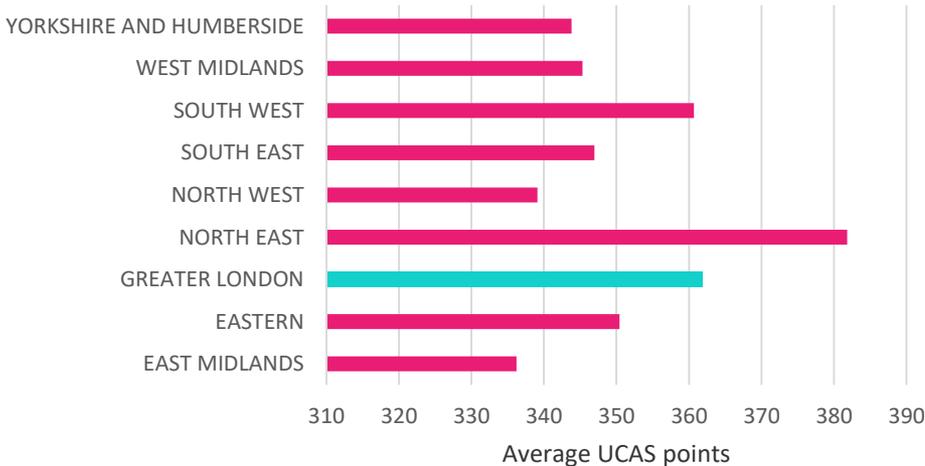
Relationship between UCAS score and drop-out rates



- Evidence shows a negative correlation between prior attainment and dropout rates.

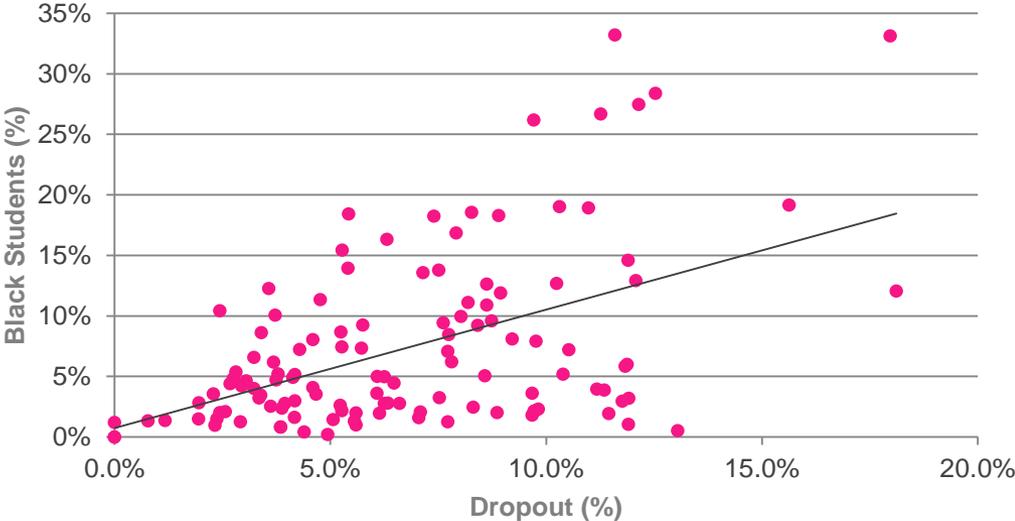
- London has one of the highest average UCAS tariffs
- But, data on north east suggests that prior attainment is unlikely to be attributing to the regional differences

Average UCAS score by region



The importance of ethnicity

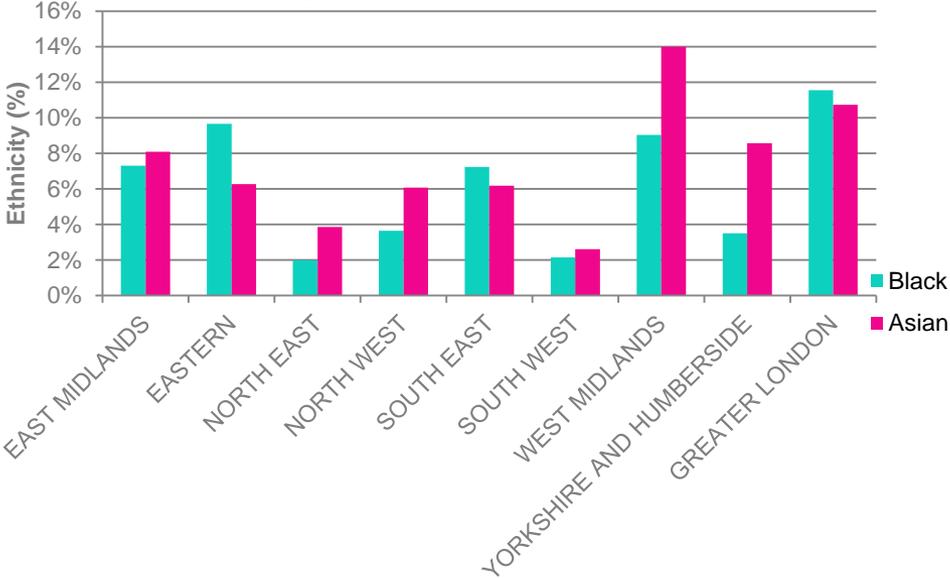
Relationship between ethnicity and drop-out rates



- London has by far the highest proportion of Black students. Other regions with a high proportion also have high dropout rates: Eastern England and the West Midlands come third and fourth bottom for retention.
- HESA provides only two minority divisions when reporting institutional-level dropout rates: Asian and Black. We know that retention levels among different Asian groups varies significantly.

- Certain ethnic groups have higher drop out rates than others. Given the differences in regional ethnicity, this could explain regional differences.
- Black students are more likely to drop out than other ethnic groups.

Regional Ethnicity Breakdown



Does being on a campus make a difference?

University non-continuation rates: campus versus non-campus

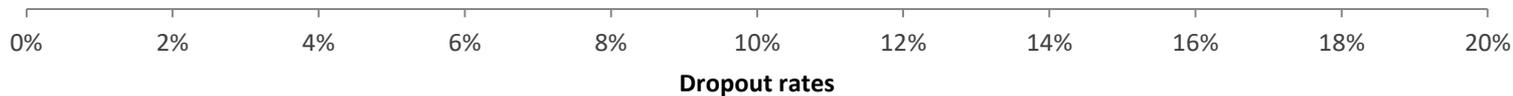
Non-campus



Campus

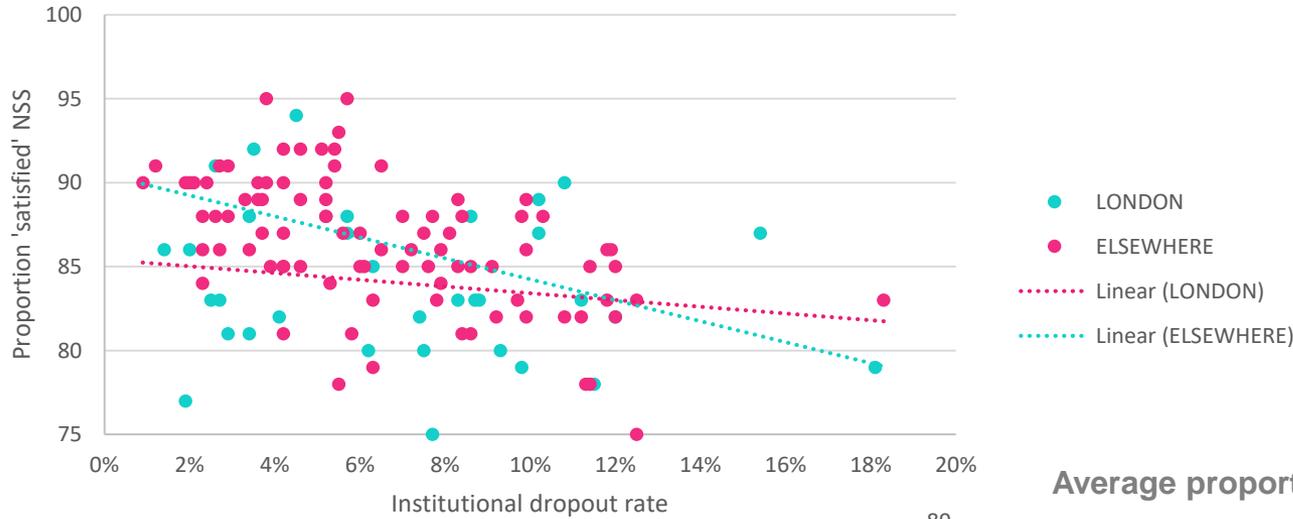


○ Universities
◆ MEAN



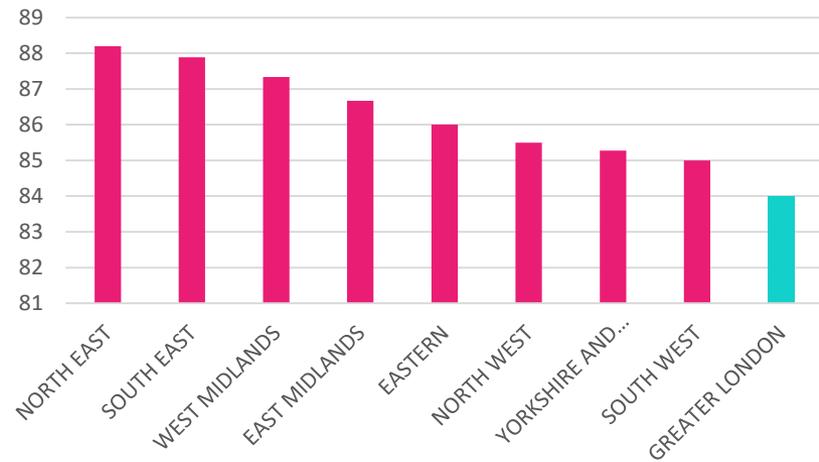
- We find that, overall, students at campus universities have a non-continuation rate of 5.9%, considerably lower than the average of 6.8% for non-campus students.
- In regions outside of the North and London, the population of campus universities have at least a one percentage point advantage over non-campus universities.
- In London and the North this picture is reversed – drop out rates for campus universities are higher than for non-campus universities.
- When looking at campus retention rates by university tariff type the pattern remains for low and high tariff institutions.
- Medium tariff campus universities have higher dropout rates than their non campus counterparts

Relationship between student satisfaction and drop out rates:



- On average London has the lowest proportion of satisfied students based on figures from the NSS
- However, the trend line is flatter within London suggesting less of an influential effect

Average proportion satisfied by region

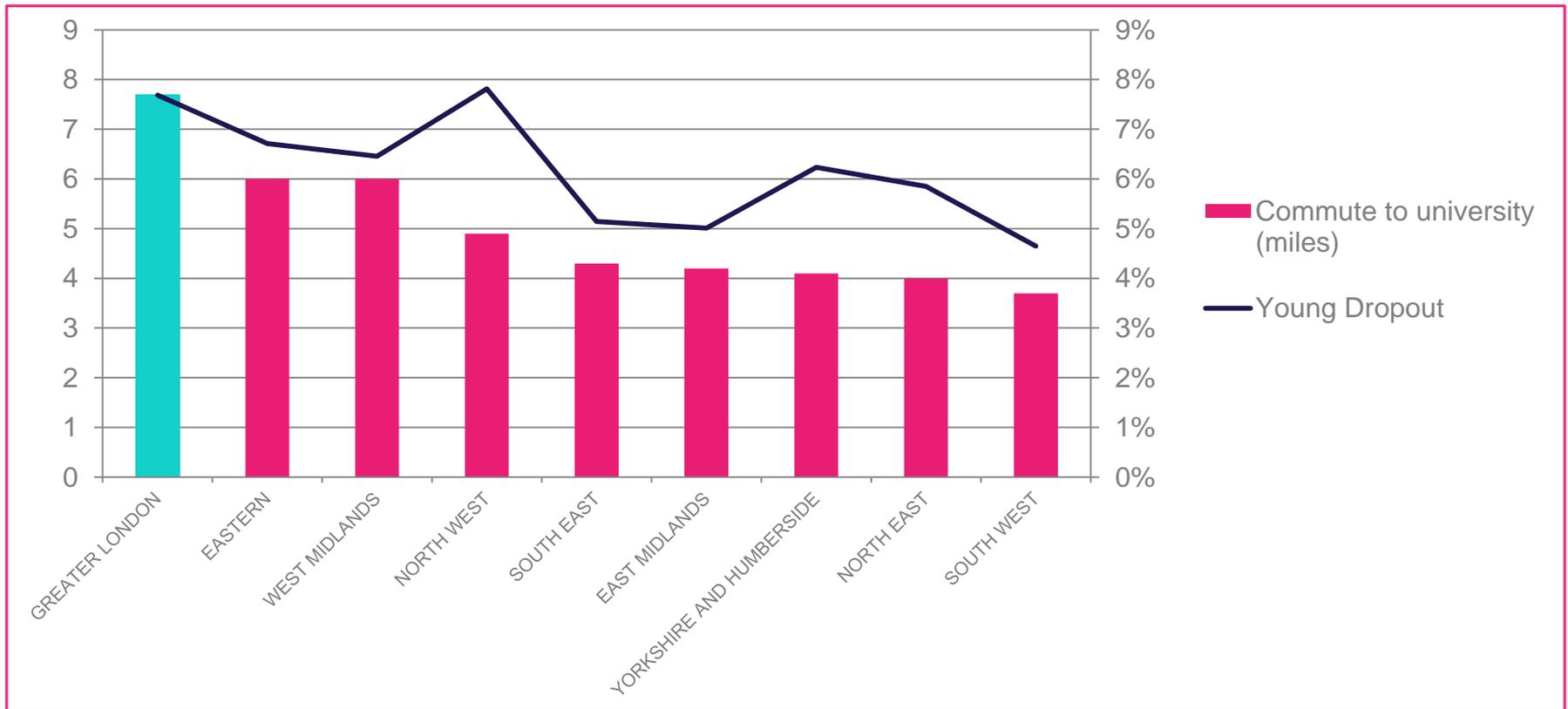


Relationship between living at home and drop out rates



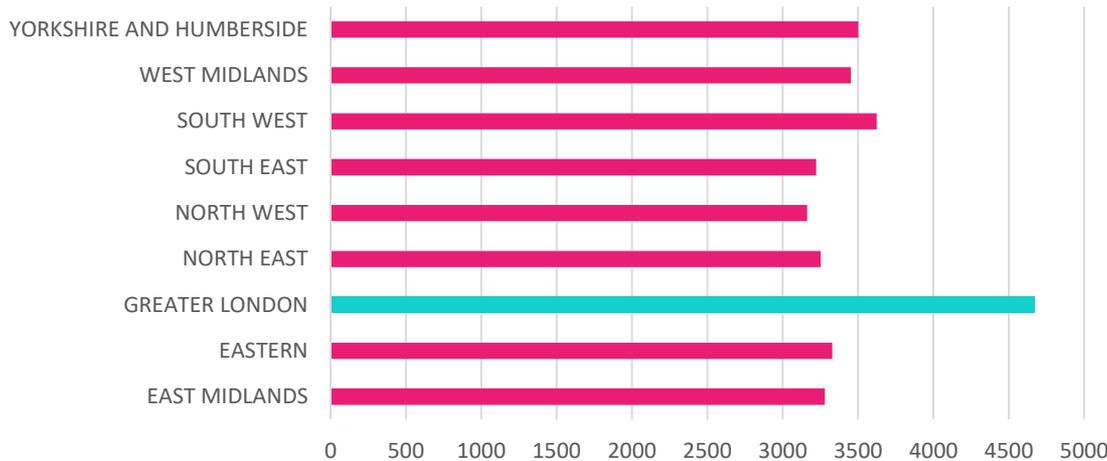
- An important metric of student living is the proportion of students living at home. Our hypothesis was that students living at home would have higher dropout rates, given the increased difficulty of engaging socially and academically in the student experience. It is possible that this is also be a product of cultural factors and / or socio-economic factors.
- The data looks to support this hypothesis, given the obvious correlation over regions.

Relationship between commuting distance to university and drop out rates



- Commuting distance, may capture the effects of those living at home being less engaged, and tending to live further away.
- However, it may also represent an isolated effect of living far away limiting the amount of time that may be spent in university, whether studying or otherwise engaging in the experience.

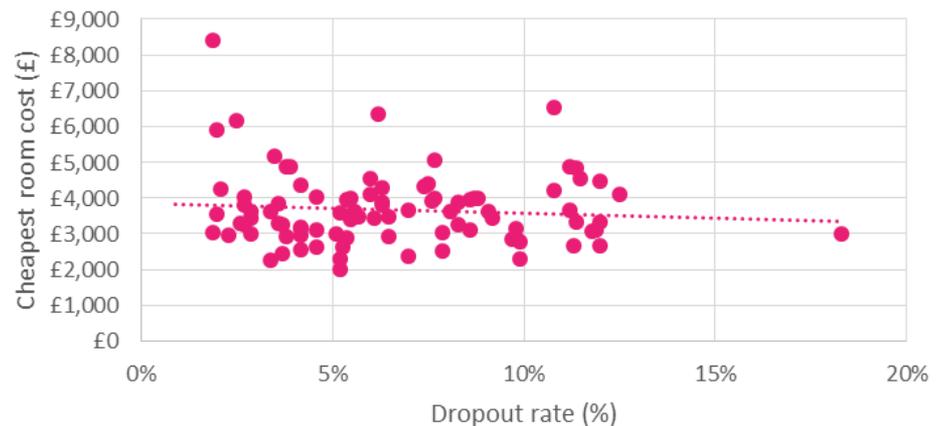
Average cheapest accomodation cost by region



- London universities have the highest average cheapest room costs available to students.
- There is difficulties in representing the regional value as institutions will have varying accommodation policies.

- At an institutional level there appears to be no correlation between the cheapest accommodation costs and the dropout rate.

Relationship between cheapest accommodation costs and dropout rates



To understand better whether there is a 'London effect' present we conducted a regression analysis that controlled for a range of factors that we believe could influence student retention.

Variable	Coefficient (*sgf)	P-value
% of Black students	0.139*	0.007
% of Asian students	-0.116*	0.036
% Female	-0.407*	0.061
% NS-SEC 4-7	0.763*	0.000
% POLAR3	0.299*	0.000
Campus dummy	-0.005	0.938
UCAS	-0.001*	0.003
% Satisfied (NSS)	-1.184*	0.057
University population	5.71e-07	0.877
Distance moved by region	0.002	0.317
<i>London dummy</i>	<i>0.262*</i>	<i>0.008</i>

The first thing to note when looking at these results is that whilst we have a **London effect present**, this result does not hold when we do not control for POLAR3. This is due to the low level of POLAR3 scores amongst London institutions. The London effect is unlikely to be robust.

However, the results add substantial evidence to the debate around the importance of student characteristics. A significant amount of variation in institutional student dropout rates is attributed to the characteristics of their student population.

Some of the variables that are insignificant at an institutional level may be of importance to certain subgroups of students.

Variables found to be significant in our regression:

- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Socio-economic background (NS-SEC and POLAR)
- NSS scores

Factors not significant but of further interest:

- Campus vs. non campus
- Commuter students
- Those studying within the same region they grew up in
- Financial constraints

The London effect:

- Negative and significant effect on retention when including POLAR3
- Given the participation rate of students attending university in London we would expect retention rates to be higher
- Based on our significant variables the London retention issue is likely to be attributed to student demographic and NSS scores

We put forward a number of policies for universities, government and local mayors

Questions?