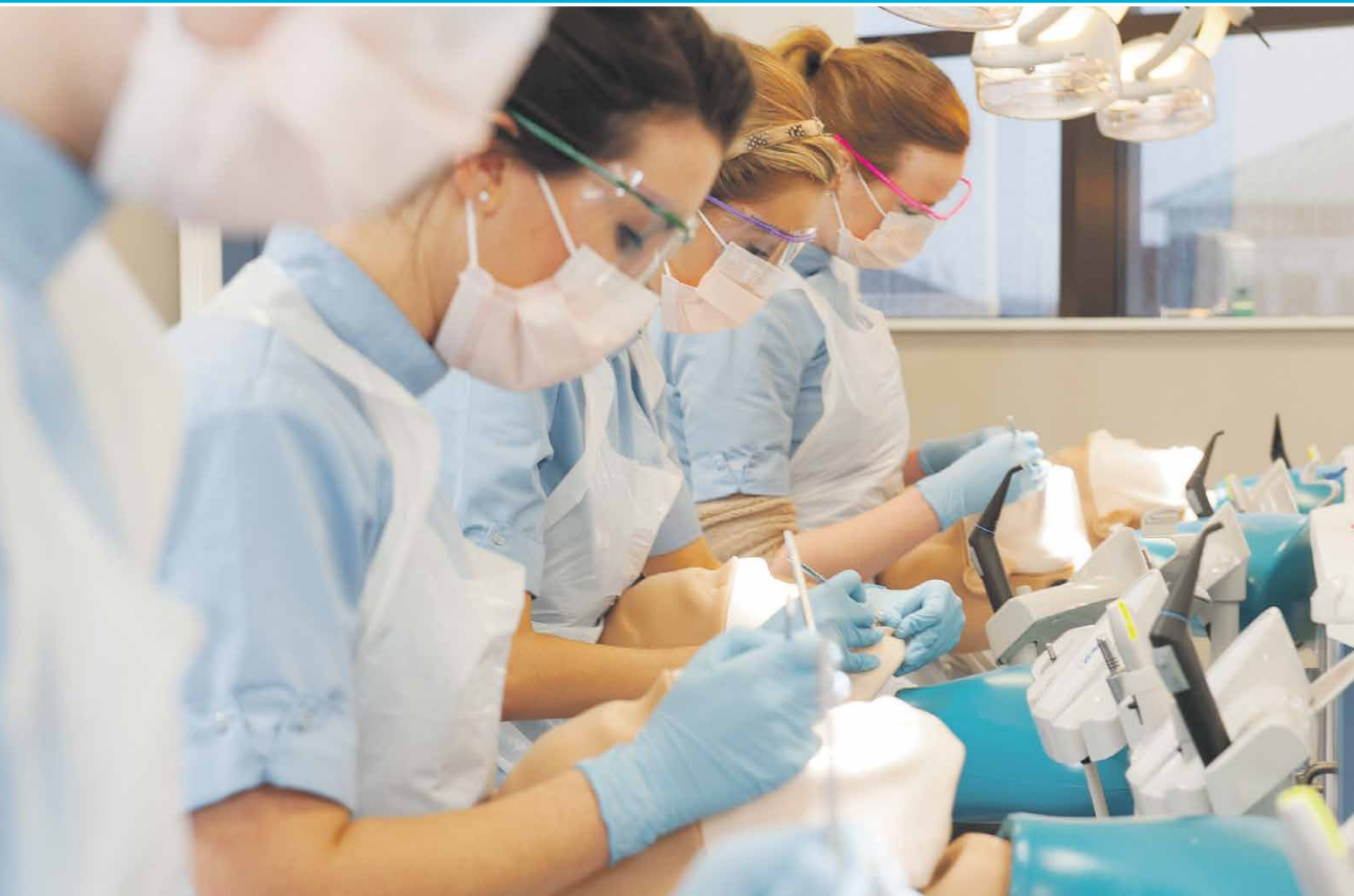




A passion for learning

The student experience at Russell Group universities



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Summary

Learning in a Russell Group university is a distinctive and special experience. It provides undergraduate and postgraduate students with outstanding opportunities to learn, develop, and realise their full potential – helping them to make the most of their university experience and gain the skills, confidence and understanding to realise their ambitions and to contribute fully to our society and economy.

Our universities have always enjoyed a reputation as being world-class for the quality of our research. From the hologram to graphene, academics at Russell Group universities have made discoveries and broken new intellectual ground that has changed and enhanced the way we live. In fact we have become victims of our own success at research because what has received far less attention – although it is equally important to us – is the outstanding education we give our students. This publication attempts to demonstrate the ways in which a compelling educational experience matters to our students, our staff, and our graduates. It grapples with myths and misconceptions that have arisen and explains why what we are offering is different

from learning at school, how we care passionately about education, how research can enhance and not detract from teaching, and how students are taught how to problem-solve, communicate clearly, learn independently and think creatively, analytically and logically.

It is now more important than ever to explain what we are providing for our students and to scotch the myths. The way universities are funded has undergone a real change over the last few years. At most of our universities, there has been a shift away from direct Government funding and towards students themselves making increased contributions to the cost of their education – albeit with substantial support from Government in terms of loans and grants. So it would not be surprising if students started asking more questions about what they are investing in. But it is also timely to release this publication now to celebrate all the additional investment our universities have made in student experience over recent years – partly as a result of changes to the funding system.

The publication is in three sections: first, the learning environment we create at Russell Group universities; second, the

learning experiences on offer for students; and finally the benefits students gain from studying at a Russell Group university. Although many of the issues discussed are relevant at all levels of study, our focus is on the experience of undergraduates. In a future publication we will be focusing more closely on the ideal learning environment for postgraduate researchers.

Section 1

Creating the ideal learning environment for students to flourish

We are continually investing in our staff, services, facilities and systems to create supportive learning environments that help students get the most from their time at Russell Group universities.

Expert academic staff teaching with enthusiasm and authority

Our staff are at the very heart of the world-class education we are aiming to provide. Whether they are leading professors with dozens of papers and books to their name or young PhD students breaking new ground in their own research they are united by one

thing: they are all experts in their field and ideally placed to engage students in up-to-date learning. That is why we focus on and invest in:

- employing outstanding academics who relish the challenge of being great teachers

- listening to, and acting on, the feedback of students in our universities. We want to know what they think about the quality of teaching, which were their favourite modules, and how well they feel supported by staff

- supporting the professional development of teaching staff in ways tailored to the different stages of an academic's career

- using specialist university centres and development funding to encourage and support innovation in teaching and learning

- having robust processes to ensure the quality of education our universities provide and searching out improvements

- celebrating the achievements of outstanding staff through teaching awards, including schemes led by students themselves.

All of these activities, and more, demonstrate the commitment of our universities to maintaining academic standards and enhancing the quality of learning

and teaching experiences on their programmes. But we cannot stand still. To remain world leaders in higher education and continue attracting the world's most talented students, we know we must strive to achieve ever-higher standards.

Excellent facilities that enhance the student learning environment

Universities have changed. We know that where and how students learn are integral to their university experience. So we have been investing in the very best facilities. Russell Group universities now have 24/7 libraries with areas where students can work in teams, use high-tech equipment, and take a break. The buildings are often stunning – not just in their aesthetics but in how space can be used imaginatively and how they actively promote problem-solving and entrepreneurialism in their design. We have also taken great strides in harnessing technological developments, from learning aids such as online access to lectures, to the more advanced virtual learning environments where students and lecturers can interact.

A learning environment that goes far beyond individual courses

But learning is not just about an academic course. So our universities offer a whole raft of support services to give students individualised advice. We fund and encourage a diverse range of co-curricular activities, including sports and societies for all kinds of interests. In this publication

we touch on these activities only briefly – but the contribution they make to the rounded experience of students at Russell Group universities should not be underestimated.

Section 2

Supporting students to get the most from the education on offer

A Russell Group education asks a lot of its students, but delivers a lot in return. The distinctive and high-quality learning experiences provided by our universities equip our graduates with a rich mix of detailed subject knowledge, as well as the attributes and broader skills that employers and graduates themselves value.

How can we help students make the transition to the university learning experience?

Learning at university is likely to be a very different experience from learning at school or college. So in recent years our universities have put more work into supporting students as they make this transition. Staff now aim to explain right from the start what students can expect in terms of course content and styles of learning. Our universities also give extra support to students at the start of their courses, through workshops, mentoring, toolkits or online resources. Many have developed student charters which describe the student–university relationship, and in some cases foundation years also provide a

route for students needing more substantial preparation for study at first-degree level.

Stimulating and challenging students to become independent learners

Alongside formal, scheduled teaching time, or contact hours, independent study is an important part of the learning experience, and our excellent libraries and learning facilities support our students as they gain in-depth subject knowledge and become independent learners. But this does not mean working in isolation.

Students are fully supported in their independent study by staff, whether that's regular meetings with personal tutors, open surgery hours where students can drop in or support from librarians to access printed and online learning materials. There is a strong sense of being part of a learning community of students and scholars at Russell Group universities, with large populations of researchers and postgraduates alongside undergraduates.

Being part of such a talented peer group, along with the stimulating and challenging approaches to learning at our universities, encourages students to stretch themselves and each other. They develop a wide range of skills and attributes that are highly sought after by employers and invaluable for tackling challenges beyond the workplace: skills in critical and original thinking, problem-solving, and a range of high-level oral and written communication skills.

Personal development planning (PDP) tools also help students to reflect on their own learning and plan their personal, educational and career progression.

How can bringing teaching and research together enrich the learning experience?

There are huge advantages of being a student in a research-intensive university: the concentration of talent, the opportunity to study with leading academics and access to richer learning facilities. The expert academic staff at Russell Group universities put students in direct contact with some of the latest research in their subject; including teaching by postgraduate students who may draw on their own research.

When research and teaching are more closely linked, students gradually learn how to engage in the process of solving research problems, acting and thinking as active problem solvers – and not merely as passive recipients of established knowledge.

Integrating research and teaching in Russell Group universities can occur throughout a student's degree course. Dissertations and final-year projects are the most well-known examples of research-led learning, but our universities also offer vacation research placements, student conferences and opportunities to publish in dedicated undergraduate journals. In addition, the close proximity of 'live' research opens a range of opportunities for interested students.

What statistics and students tell us about the Russell Group learning experience

Learning at Russell Group universities is rich and multi-faceted, and the quality of the experience is sometimes difficult to capture fully in quantitative form. Universities now publish data on the amount of time students spend in class. But the amount of scheduled teaching time is only one factor in describing any degree course and needs careful interpretation. We understand why there is a focus on contact hours, but it can be misleading and unhelpful. It is important to consider subject differences, group sizes, staff expertise and course design as well. The data in the Key Information Sets is just part of the story.

When it comes to the students' own opinions of their learning experiences at our universities, they report high levels of satisfaction: the average overall satisfaction rating for Russell Group universities in the 2013 National Student Survey was 88% compared to the national average of 85%. We also see high levels of student retention. We want to know what students think so we gather feedback on different aspects of their experience and draw on their views to make improvements. Many graduates maintain a lifelong relationship with their university; a strong indication that they had a positive experience during their time as an undergraduate or postgraduate student.

Section 3

Giving graduates the best chance of success in the wider world

There are many indicators which highlight the success of Russell Group students during their degree courses: the rate of students who complete their degrees is better than at many other institutions in the UK and other countries, and our students are more likely to achieve excellent degree results. It's a pattern of success that continues when our graduates take their next steps in the world.

High percentages of students in work or further study six months after graduation

Six months after graduation is a very early stage in a graduate's career but the data which is independently collected at that time does give a good indication of the paths taken by our graduates. 93% of first-degree graduates from Russell Group universities are in work or study – compared to 90% for non-Russell Group graduates. The figure is 93% for our graduates from masters degrees and 96% for graduates from doctoral study. First-degree students from research-intensive universities are also more likely to progress straight to postgraduate study, with those who go on to PhDs at Russell Group universities shown to be more likely to complete their studies successfully.

Increased earning power and career satisfaction

Research suggests that, on average, Russell Group graduates earn more than other graduates. One recent study shows that 41% of those in work were earning £30,000 or more after three years, compared to 32% for graduates from all UK universities.

Career satisfaction is also higher among Russell Group graduates, with more reporting that their higher education experience prepared them well for their career aspirations. Our graduates have a wide range of career options open to them and are well placed to take on some of the most demanding graduate roles. However, the benefits of a degree are not simply financial. Evidence also shows that graduates are more likely to be happy, healthy and active citizens in their communities compared to the population as a whole.

The start of a lifelong connection with a Russell Group university

More and more we see Russell Group graduates maintaining links with their former university. In 2011–12, more than 120,000 alumni made a donation to their old university, and graduates also get involved in activities such as mentoring and helping students prepare for job interviews. For many of our students, their degree is the start of a connection with a Russell Group university that lasts a lifetime; an indication perhaps of their own positive learning experiences.

Committed to excellence

The pursuit of excellence shapes the approach of every Russell Group university, whether it be in teaching and learning, research or the wider dissemination of knowledge in our work with businesses and communities. This publication details how our commitment to excellence in education provides students with the very best opportunities to learn, develop and realise their potential. They learn to think both creatively and analytically; to be independent-minded but evidence-based; to be confident in challenging received wisdom but willing to learn from experience; and to communicate complex ideas clearly and simply. As a result a Russell Group university education benefits not just graduates themselves – but our economy, culture and society. ■

Section 1



Creating the ideal learning environment for students to flourish

Russell Group universities are committed to providing our talented students and outstanding staff with a stimulating and supportive environment where they can achieve their very best.

Fundamentally, our university learning environments are created by people: specifically, our internationally-renowned academic staff and high-potential students, who come from all over the world to work and study at Russell Group universities. All of these people are driven by the pursuit of excellence, no matter what the area of academic activity; from teaching and learning, to research and the wider dissemination of knowledge through partnerships with businesses and communities.

In this section, we focus on the key aspects of our learning environments that support this pursuit of excellence. These take many different shapes and forms, including the expertise of our staff and opportunities for their professional development, innovative buildings, learning resources and approaches to teaching, and comprehensive academic and personal support for all our students.

The chance to learn from some of the world's most respected academics

Students at Russell Group universities have the privilege to learn from established, world-leading academics and 'rising stars', including postgraduates and academics at the earlier stages of their careers. There is a significant concentration of research-active academic staff in Russell Group universities: not only are they experts in their fields, but they are also ideally placed to teach up-to-date material with enthusiasm and authority.

Studies show that there are clear benefits to students from being taught by staff who undertake their own research. For example, in a study¹ which asked students and staff to comment on the relationship between research and teaching, the following factors were identified:

- Research-active academics are at the cutting-edge of their fields and therefore have more authority to teach their subject.
- The enthusiasm of academics for their research is infectious and rubs off on students.
- Research-active academics teach more relevant, up-to-date material.
- Research-active academics teach from their immediate research experience rather than reproducing second-hand knowledge from textbooks.²

But our universities don't take the quality of their teaching for granted, and we greatly value the views of students, as highlighted in the UK National Student Survey:

- 91% of Russell Group students agreed or strongly agreed that 'Staff are good at explaining things'.
- 90% of Russell Group students agreed or strongly agreed that 'The course is intellectually stimulating', comparing favourably with the national average of 85%.³

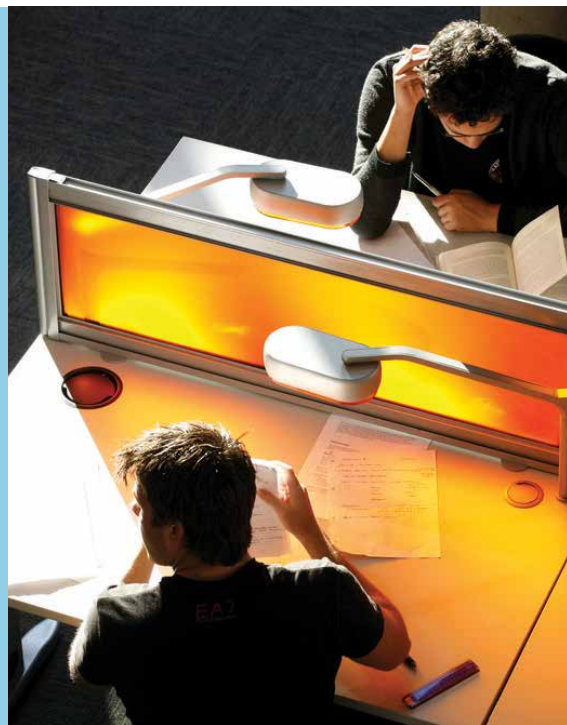
These scores are very encouraging but they do not make us complacent. We understand that while the expertise of academic staff is important in achieving such high levels of satisfaction, it is not the only factor. Excellence in teaching and learning can only be achieved if staff and students are properly supported; so that staff have both the knowledge and skills to succeed, and students understand what they are expected to contribute.

Supporting our academic staff to deliver excellence in teaching and learning

Russell Group universities demonstrate our commitment to the pursuit of excellence in learning and teaching through a range of activities aimed at:

- supporting and encouraging academic staff to engage in continuing professional development throughout their careers, from PhD students to professors
- providing funding to support practical and innovative projects that result in a better experience for students
- advancing the understanding of teaching and learning in higher education through research into pedagogy
- recognising the considerable achievements of our staff through teaching awards at institutional and national level.

In the last official national assessment of research quality in UK universities, 60% of all 'world-leading' research in the UK was found in the then 20 Russell Group universities – who represented just 12% of all UK institutions.



Bringing academic study to life

At Queen Mary, staff are taking learning beyond the classroom and enhancing the student experience. For example:

- Undergraduate medical students are working shifts with the London Air Ambulance Service, shadowing some of the UK's leading paramedics and trauma doctors.
- A final-year option for undergraduate history students allows them to contribute research to the creation of new galleries at the Imperial War Museum.
- As part of the public law module, undergraduate law students joined academics, MPs and democracy campaigners in presenting evidence to the body scrutinising plans for a major reform of the House of Lords.

Helping our academics become the very best teachers

Our universities are determined to support our teaching staff's development throughout their whole academic careers: from training for PhD students undertaking their first teaching activities, to project grants and teaching awards for established lecturers and professors; from one-off events to long-term research programmes.

Our approach to teacher training typically includes opportunities to study for a postgraduate qualification in academic practice; in many cases new academic staff *must* study for a postgraduate teaching qualification unless they have significant previous experience. This gives staff a chance to explore how best to plan, deliver and evaluate their teaching and assessment activities. They also learn about relevant higher education research and how they can draw critically on the research base to enhance their practice.

Studying for formal qualifications is important to teaching and learning excellence, but it is not the only continuing professional development activity our universities encourage:

- **Peer-reviewed academic development resources**, such as Teaching at Nottingham, offer both a window onto teaching culture and a space for the critical evaluation of teaching practice. Nottingham's continually updated collection of over 300 individual resources, typically two to five-minute videos or 500- to 1,000-word texts, represents the staff experience of teaching and reflects a thriving teaching culture in a research-led university. The collection is widely used by staff at Nottingham, around UK higher education institutions (HEIs) and internationally, and is just one strand of an initiative known formally as PESL (Promoting Enhanced Student Learning), which implements the university's teaching and learning strategy.⁴
- **Peer observation of teaching and peer dialogue** can be valuable tools for academic staff development. For example, at Imperial College London peer observation of teaching

takes several forms: as part of the probationary period for new staff; as continuing professional development within a department or faculty scheme; or as personal development where individuals may seek observation of their teaching by peers.

Encouraging innovation

When it comes to excellence in teaching, our universities are not complacent and we actively seek out new, advanced ways to enhance the student learning experience.

Sometimes, projects emerge from the practice of individual academic staff, and often our universities have dedicated internal funding streams to support innovation, like the College Teaching Fund at King's College London, which has invested in a wide range of projects since 2004.⁵

Our universities have a strong track record of promoting the innovative development of teaching and learning, both within our own universities and more widely. For example:

- The Russell Group hosted 14 out of 24 national centres to promote teaching and learning in individual subject areas.

- In recent years, the Russell Group hosted 21 Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs), and collaborated in the creation of a further four centres.⁶ These centres attracted Government funding via the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland.

- Russell Group universities in Scotland and Wales have received funding from their national HE funding bodies to invest in improving the student experience, as detailed in each university's own learning and teaching enhancement strategy, and including:

- the construction of new facilities and buildings in conjunction with the development of innovative teaching and learning activities
- projects to develop teaching and learning resources for individual subject areas
- research into topics cutting across all subjects, such as how the relationship between research and teaching can be further enhanced.

Although funding for national centres and CETLs has now ended, our academics continue to contribute to, and invest in, the development of teaching and learning activities within their subject communities. The benefits are often shared widely, beyond the boundaries of the institution in which they originated,⁷ and in some circumstances our universities have been able to find ways of continuing to fund work previously undertaken by CETLs, such as at the University of Warwick.

Recognising and rewarding excellence

To drive ever-increasing standards in teaching and learning, we understand that we must place teaching and learning performance on a par with research performance, making it an integral part of staff promotion appraisals and ensuring that we reward success through our own and external teaching awards.

84 staff from Russell Group universities have won a Higher Education Academy National Teaching Fellowship since the scheme began in 2000.

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Providing academic leadership for teaching and learning

The **Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning** at Warwick aims to support the university's commitment to building and delivering innovative teaching programmes, which have a real impact on the student experience.

The Institute is a designated space where colleagues can develop their teaching practice, and be encouraged and supported as they explore and apply the innovative teaching practices, including Open-space Learning, that help shape teaching and learning across the university.

Enthusiasm and new ideas are captured and shared with the wider academic community to help raise their profile and inspire others.

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

Assisting understanding and revision through online lecture content

ReCap is Newcastle University's lecture and event recording service. It allows audio and visual material, including the lecturer's voice, presentation slides and visualised documents, to be published online in an automated, easy-to-use process.

The system enables students to review lectures and additional materials in their own time, helping them to better understand complex topics and assisting their revision for exams. This is particularly helpful for students with dyslexia and non-native English speakers.

Surveys have highlighted a positive student reaction to ReCap, with 90% of those surveyed rating it as 'useful' or 'very useful', and around 80% stating that they accessed recordings to make additional notes, to revisit difficult concepts or for revision purposes. Since its introduction in 2007–08, over 24,000 recordings have been made which have received over 900,000 viewings.

Russell Group universities are research-intensive institutions competing with the best research universities around the world. So it is perhaps no surprise that research performance is considered carefully when academic staff apply for promotion. But in recent years, many Russell Group universities have focused more and more on teaching and learning performance in individual promotion appraisals. Some of our universities have also introduced teaching-based routes for career development, which create opportunities for academic staff to progress in their careers while focusing in particular on teaching and learning.

Most Russell Group universities now operate teaching awards, which typically invite nominations annually from staff and/or students. Run by the university, the students' union, or a partnership of the two, they are an excellent opportunity to recognise and celebrate the achievements of academic staff and can have a real impact within a university. This has been demonstrated particularly clearly at the University of Edinburgh, where the Students Association's Teaching Awards for 2011 attracted a total of 5,168 nominations for 777 academic staff, 277 courses and 73 departments.⁸

The commitment of Russell Group academics to teaching and learning has also been recognised through the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme, helping to attract funding from the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and providing an opportunity for continued professional development in aspects of teaching and learning or pedagogy.⁹

Initiatives also exist to recognise and reward high quality teaching amongst the many postgraduate students who hold teaching responsibilities at Russell Group universities. For example, the University of Nottingham has been running a teaching award since 2008 for postgraduates who teach.¹⁰

Supporting our students to get the most from the university experience

The achievement of academic potential is driven at Russell Group universities through a partnership

between our internationally renowned staff and highly-qualified students. Our students quite rightly expect to find a strong supporting framework in place within our institutions for teaching and learning.

Vital components of this framework include:

- the responsibility that each university has to maintain academic standards, and to award its own degrees according to those standards
- the operation of policies and processes which assess the quality of current teaching provision for students and identify any areas for future improvement (usually referred to as 'quality assurance and enhancement').

From policies and processes to investing in learning facilities, resources and support systems, the following explores how our universities are continually focusing on academic provision for students.

Maintaining, monitoring and improving academic standards

Students play an active role in academic quality assurance and enhancement at Russell Group universities, and each university develops its own thorough and substantial policies and processes to help it meet its responsibilities and commitment to excellence.

This publication does not aim to go into detail about these policies and processes. Instead we wish to highlight some aspects of the work our universities undertake in this area which demonstrates our commitment to our students:

- **External examiners.** The role of external examiners in UK universities sometimes does not receive the attention it deserves, but it is vital in helping to maintain consistent academic standards in universities.¹¹ Every year, thousands of academics and other experts visit another university department to review its assessment practices. An important part of this work is checking examination and coursework marking, with external examiners operating within their own academic subject to provide independent,

expert advice. Where relevant to the academic subject, external examiners can include experts from industry, which enables employers to contribute a valuable perspective to the work of our universities.

- **Regular reviews of modules and courses.** Each Russell Group university has arrangements in place to ensure that individual modules and courses are reviewed regularly and systematically, including receiving feedback from students on their experience. These reviews provide a formal mechanism for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning at a detailed level. They help to ensure that course content is kept up-to-date and to identify any areas where improvements can be made.
- **Periodic internal reviews.** As well as regular reviews at module or course level, universities operate internal reviews that look more broadly across academic provision at department or faculty level – for example, the University of Sheffield has a Learning and Teaching Annual Reflection exercise.

- **External reviews and inspections.** The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) conducts external reviews to look at quality and standards at every university. Universities also participate in reviews of particular subjects, conducted by expert external bodies, known as PSRBs (Public, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies; such as the Royal Society of Chemistry). This is another area where Russell Group universities are extremely active and successful; for example, the University of Warwick currently has programmes accredited, approved or recognised by over 30 bodies.¹²

- **Institution-wide activities.** Russell Group universities also seek to identify opportunities to enhance learning and teaching that apply widely, across many subjects – for example, University College London has a project to internationalise the curriculum.

Every Russell Group university has been awarded the highest available grade by the Quality Assurance Agency in the most recent review of teaching and learning standards.



UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

Scientific teaching facilities

The University of Liverpool opened its £23 million teaching laboratories in 2012. The Central Teaching Laboratories allow students from different disciplines to work together to learn diagnostic and measurement skills that prepare them for employment. They include £5.6 million worth of state-of-the-art laboratory equipment, designed to support new teaching modules and a variety of degree programmes, such as physics, earth sciences, chemistry and archaeology, and to promote interdisciplinary science.

Built around a central atrium, the facility has seven laboratories and can accommodate 1,000 students, as well as being used for hosting events involving the local community, schools and colleges.

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Investing in 'virtual mouths' for dental students

At the University of Leeds, **simulation technology** now allows dental students to hone their drilling skills on virtual patients. The virtual 3D mouths use haptic technology, similar to that used in hand-held controllers that vibrate in computer games or in-flight simulators for pilot training, so that students receive tactile feedback.

This means Leeds has enough virtual mouths so that every student on its course can regularly experience the virtual world of dentistry.

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

Providing a new library

Opened in 2009, the McClay library is situated close to the historic Lanyon Building, one of the signature features of Belfast's built environment. The building can accommodate 2,000 readers and 1.5 million volumes, and will eventually incorporate all satellite libraries around the Belfast campus and provide enough space for 20 years' future collection growth.

The library's internal environment has been tailored to include common reader spaces, quiet zones, historic and special collections, artefact displays, digital media and innovative socio-educational environments where students can enjoy the benefits of collaborative learning.

Sustainability was a critical factor in the design and construction of the library; the building meets the highest environmental standards and was commended in the 2011 Civic Trust Awards.

A great deal of time and money are invested in these kinds of processes and they play a vital supporting role in achieving excellence in teaching and learning. As autonomous institutions, our universities have their own responsibility for maintaining the quality of teaching on their programmes – their reputation depends upon it. National frameworks, such as those implemented by the QAA, can also play a role in helping ensure that minimum thresholds are met by a diverse range of education providers, whether they are new entrants to higher education or long-established universities.

But given that quality assurance and enhancement activities are now well established, there is a strong case for lighter touch QAA reviews for universities with a track record of successful provision. A one-size-fits-all review framework cannot hope to reflect the full diversity of the higher education sector and its role should not be overstated; universities should rather be allowed to concentrate resources on enhancing the student experience within their particular higher education context.

Investing in learning facilities, resources and buildings

Students have high expectations of the facilities that will be available in their particular subject area, and more widely throughout their university. Thanks to our twin focus on research alongside teaching and learning, Russell Group universities are able to provide outstanding facilities in everything from science laboratories to world-class libraries and online resources.

Our universities also invest in specialist, high-cost facilities that enable students to study subjects such as dentistry, veterinary studies and minority foreign languages, and we use e-learning software to underpin excellent learning experiences for students.

We are pleased to provide students in all subjects with some of the biggest and best library collections in the country; in some cases resources of international distinction. Increasingly, students also have access to libraries and study spaces which are open 24 hours a day.

In 2010–11, Russell Group universities:

- spent twice as much on libraries (per student) as other UK universities – total expenditure £284 million
- held 61.3 million individual items in their libraries – that's 57% of the total held in all UK university libraries, while Russell Group universities teach 23% of all university students in the UK.¹³

Enhancing academic skills with online tutorials

York's academic skills support has recently been enhanced through online academic skills tutorials which focus on critical thinking, managing reading, referencing and academic writing. The tutorials are designed to be a stimulating resource for all students and were developed by staff and students at the university, co-ordinated by the Learning Enhancement Team in the Academic Support Office.

More and more, online learning resources are being used to support face-to-face teaching and learning, and enhance the student experience in Russell Group universities. These include:

- electronic journals and books
- online recordings of lectures
- virtual learning environments (VLEs).

In addition to state-of-the-art libraries, Russell Group universities have made significant investments in high-quality buildings and learning facilities in recent years, demonstrably enhancing the student learning experience.

Support for students that goes beyond formal teaching

Each and every Russell Group university devotes considerable efforts to ensuring our students get the most from their time at university. These efforts extend well beyond the subject-based teaching and learning activities that form the core of each course.

At our universities, professional support staff work in partnership with academic staff and are dedicated

to helping undergraduates and postgraduates to get the most from the student experience, often by attending to the specific study needs of individuals. Support activity varies widely and includes scheduled meetings with students, drop-in sessions, training courses, extra classes and online support and information.

Like most Russell Group universities, the University of Nottingham has a student support service. There is a centre on each of Nottingham's three campuses which students contact by phone or email or visit in person to access many services, including a personal and practical approach to academic study, with specialist academic support for students with dyslexia, dyspraxia and other specific learning difficulties.

Further examples of the academic study support available to students at Russell Group universities include:

- **Academic skills development.** We offer a range of support in this area, often delivered via a virtual learning environment, training sessions or drop-in centres.
- **Maths.** We provide students from a wide range of disciplines with extra help to develop the maths skills they need to succeed on their course.
- **Learning a foreign language.** Many of our universities offer this option, either as part of or in addition to a student's course.
- **Postgraduate skills training.** This ranges from sessions on generic skills such as time management, to the development of discipline and project-specific research skills.
- **Academic integrity.** We provide advice and guidance on how to fulfil the conventions of academic writing and research, promoting good practice and helping students to understand and avoid plagiarism in their work.
- **Information literacy.** We encourage students to use and explore the full range of information resources available, such as online journals, specialist databases and interactive training tools.

In recent years, we have significantly improved our support services for students with disabilities. Our disability advisors meet with students to discuss their academic and other needs, and offer confidential advice and support. Advisors often specialise in particular disabilities and have a range of knowledge and experience about the challenges that disabled students can encounter during their time at university. Eligible UK students can apply to receive support through a Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), which helps to pay for extra study-related costs that are a direct result of a student's disability, medical condition, mental health difficulty or specific learning difficulty.

Enhancing every aspect of the student experience

The student experience and academic success are about more than a student's studies, although of course this is a big part of it. Russell Group universities recognise the importance of co- and extra-curricular activities that not only make university life fun and interesting, but also help our students to build the team-working, communication, organisational and other skills that will stand them in good stead in today's competitive job market and later life.

Students' unions play a vital role at all of our universities. They coordinate student input into the management of the university, and provide valuable advice and support to individual students. They also support events, societies, sports clubs, volunteering and fundraising projects. These co-curricular activities play an important role in helping students to make the most of their time at university and increasingly our universities are helping students to recognise the skills they develop through such activities and to understand their relevance in the workplace (skills development and recognition are discussed further in Section 2).

Russell Group universities work in close partnership with their students' unions and the wider student body, involving students in the governance of their institutions through curriculum development, quality assurance processes and more. For example, at the University of Exeter a Budget Scrutiny Group, co-chaired by the President of the Students' Guild

and the university's Registrar, meets at least twice a year to ensure that the university is investing in areas identified as priorities by the student body.¹⁴

A number of Russell Group universities have also made significant financial investments in their students' unions. For example:

- Newcastle University Students' Union reopened in 2011 following an £8 million refurbishment. The inside of the Grade II listed building has been transformed with new facilities in the heart of campus, including 24-hour computer clusters and social learning areas, a brand new Student Advice Centre, a dedicated sports, societies and volunteering area, and a whole range of new social facilities.
- Sheffield Students' Union benefited from investment of £5 million in its accommodation which reopened in 2010. A further major development project is now underway to bring together the Students' Union with its neighbour 'University House' to create a new and exciting space for students, staff and visitors.
- The University of Manchester is planning to invest around £3 million in refurbishing and extending its Students' Union. This is just one element of a far larger campus plan that will see the investment of £1 billion over the next decade to create a world-class campus for staff and students.¹⁵

The message we want to send to our students, and the wider world, is that every aspect of the student experience is important to Russell Group universities. To support this, alongside working directly with students through our students' unions, we are continually investing in facilities and services, often including very substantial commitments to providing sports and performing arts facilities, and student accommodation.

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

Focusing on maths skills for all

Some students lack the confidence to cope with the maths element of their studies. At Cardiff University, the **Maths Support Service** provides **all students, regardless of their course**, with the chance to build the maths skills they need for success in their degree and future employment.

The services available include additional classes, general drop-in sessions and advice on online resources.

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Supporting language learning

The Oxford University Language Centre has been operating for over 30 years. It supports members of the university and colleges who need foreign languages for study and research, academic exchange, and personal and professional development, through excellent library resources and a mixture of paid and free courses.

Undergraduate and postgraduate students can take a course in any of nine languages where it supports their studies, the only charge being a modest course registration fee. The Language Centre library holds an impressive range of materials covering 140 languages available for use by students and staff.



Characteristics of the Russell Group learning environment

- High-quality teaching and learning activities undertaken by expert academic staff and highly qualified students

- Initiatives and funding to enhance teaching skills and recognise achievements through teaching awards, and to develop innovative teaching techniques and resources

- Policies and processes to check students are assessed against robust academic standards, and that the quality of teaching and learning meets expectations and is improving

- Learning resources and facilities that support learning, such as laboratories, libraries and e-resources

- A broader supporting environment that allows students to make the most of their time at university, including student support services, students' unions, sports activities and student accommodation

Conclusion: Russell Group learning environments allow academic excellence to flourish

Achieving academic excellence is not something that happens by accident. It is made possible when brilliant people are brought together with excellent resources in a supportive environment. This is not an easy mix to achieve but it is something that all Russell Group universities are committed to delivering. Our universities are built on firm foundations but we are not complacent; we are always seeking out new ways to move forward and improve. We are determined to become even stronger through continued innovation to provide the excellent learning environments that our students both expect and deserve. ■

Section 2



Supporting students to get the most from the education on offer

We are often asked to explain more about how students learn, why the learning experience is different at a research-intensive university and why, for example, they have fewer contact hours than at school. We understand we have to keep explaining what the student experience is like at a leading university and how our academics share their experience and passion for their subjects.

In Section 1 we demonstrated how Russell Group universities work to provide ideal environments for learning. In this section we focus on the learning experiences of students at our universities that take place within those supportive environments.

Russell Group universities offer students great opportunities to become successful, independent learners with excellent critical thinking and problem-solving skills, who take responsibility for making the most of their time at our universities. At the same time, students are supported and encouraged by personal and academic tutors, and have access to a wide range of tools and services to help their development.

Crucially, we pay attention to the development of students throughout their courses, whether at undergraduate or postgraduate level. So for undergraduates we provide particular help in the transition from studying at school to university. As their course develops, students can expect to engage with research and undertake more challenging assignments, but always within a supportive environment. For postgraduate researchers, there are courses in research skills development, and other forms of support, such as mentoring schemes, to help postgraduates on their way to becoming independent researchers in their own right.

This gives benefits to students studying at Russell Group institutions in terms of both the quality of the learning experience and the opportunities to develop the skills and attributes needed for future success. The following explores some of the defining characteristics of this highly sought-after learning experience.

Common characteristics of the Russell Group learning experience

Each student's experience at university will of course be unique, shaped by a whole range of factors, from the place and subject of study to the personal interests and preferences of the individual: even on a single degree course at one university there will be a diversity of student experiences. But there are some common characteristics that tend to apply across the diversity of subjects.

At university, students can expect to encounter the following challenges:

- **To develop in-depth subject knowledge.** Students learn about the body of knowledge that has developed in their academic discipline in greater depth than at earlier stages in their education.

Russell Group academics are experts in their fields and committed to bring learning to life, engaging and inspiring the students on their courses.

- **To develop skills to tackle a wide range of future challenges in work and life.** Students develop a wide range of skills during their studies, including analytical and communication skills, and the abilities to construct arguments, and to think originally and creatively when faced with complex problems. These skills can help students prepare to take on the most demanding graduate jobs.

At Russell Group universities, students are part of a talented peer group and have the chance to study with expert academic staff. This provides an ideal environment for developing a wide range of skills to a high level that can enrich graduates' experiences at work and in life.

- **To become more independent learners.** Students spend more time in private study at university, giving them the chance to develop valuable skills such as planning their own work

and exploring unique avenues rather than simply being spoon-fed knowledge they later regurgitate.

Russell Group universities support students to make the most of this activity and are particularly well placed to provide excellent laboratories, libraries and other independent learning facilities for students to use.

- **To engage with some of the latest thinking in their subject.** Students can expect to learn a certain amount of 'core' knowledge, but it is also typical for some elements of an undergraduate or postgraduate taught course to involve engagement with recent research findings. At postgraduate research level students will first engage with existing research and then make an original contribution through their own work.

At Russell Group universities students will encounter staff who are active researchers, publishing new work in their field. These members of staff are able to speak from first-hand experience about what it is like to do research and may even use their own research findings in their teaching.

- **To become part of a learning community.** Students at university are part of a learning community that comprises undergraduates, postgraduates, early-career researchers, lecturers and professors. These communities can be expected to cherish learning for its own sake and promote respect for the value of knowledge. It can be inspiring for students to discover they are part of such a community and to see their own learning as just one step along a continuous path that could stretch well beyond the end of their first degree course.

In large, research-intensive universities such as those in the Russell Group, where there is a larger proportion of postgraduates and research staff, this sense of being part of a bigger learning community can be particularly tangible and beneficial.

As these challenges show, studying is a demanding experience but at the same time it is an extremely rewarding one. In order for students to take full advantage our universities make sure they are eased into the university way of life.

Smoothing the transition to a new way of learning

At Russell Group universities, our courses aim to build on each level of learning and achievement so that the curriculum supports the development of students over time: undergraduates build on their learning experiences at school or college; postgraduates develop their learning in new directions, whether through a taught course or research degree. One of the crucial stages is the beginning of each course.

For undergraduates

Learning at university is likely to be very different to learning at school or college, and in recent years our universities have put more work into helping students to understand and deal with this transition. From the very start, staff take the time to explain what students can expect in terms of course content and the styles of learning they will encounter. Our universities also use a variety of methods to deliver extra support to students at the start of their courses, such as workshops, mentoring, toolkits or online resources (see example on page 25 from Cambridge). This all helps students understand what they can expect from studying at university.

Some Russell Group universities offer foundation years in subjects such as science, mathematics and engineering, which can be particularly helpful for: international students; those who lack the required entry qualifications but have clearly demonstrated their potential in other subject areas; and students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

It is also important that students understand their rights and responsibilities from the outset, and our universities are proactive about communicating these through, for example, face-to-face induction sessions and documents such as student handbooks. Many

“One of the most rewarding and challenging features of an Oxford education is the need for independent study, which was not an approach to learning adopted at my comprehensive school. The transition was a challenging period but as I developed the skills I needed to succeed at Oxford it was also one of the most rewarding periods. With the help of my college tutor, I progressed from feeling inferior to confident in a relatively short period.”¹

Student at St. Catherine's College, Oxford

of our universities have chosen to develop a 'Student Charter' or 'Student Partnership Agreement', often with active input from students, which helps to define the respective rights, expectations and responsibilities of students, staff and institutions. Charters can help students and staff to be clear about what the university provides and what it expects in return. They also help universities to be clear and consistent about what they are offering (see example on page 34 from Manchester).²

As all these examples show, Russell Group universities are committed to welcoming their new students each year and helping them adjust to the experience of being a university student. It is also worth noting that many students receive invaluable and more individualised advice and guidance, perhaps by dropping into 'surgery hours' offered by academic staff, meeting their personal tutor or contacting a student information centre. These types of support can be used at any time but are often particularly valuable at the start of the course.

For postgraduates

Our universities work hard to welcome new students to their courses. The short, intense nature of postgraduate taught study and the range of issues faced by postgraduates, many of whom are international or mature students, mean that it is perhaps even more critical for postgraduate taught students to receive transition support, helping them prepare for and make the best possible start to their studies.

The particular needs of postgraduates vary and our universities offer a wide range of activities, from postgraduate orientation events aimed at all students, to meetings with individual students focused on their particular needs. In addition, tailored events are provided for international postgraduates to help them settle in and get the most from their experience at a Russell Group university.

Stimulating and challenging students to become independent learners

A culture of independent or autonomous learning, set within a well-resourced and research-intensive environment, is at the very heart of the learning experience within Russell Group universities. But 'independent' does not mean 'isolated learning', with no support from staff and other students. It is about individuals taking responsibility for their own learning but with plenty of support, guidance and direction to help them.

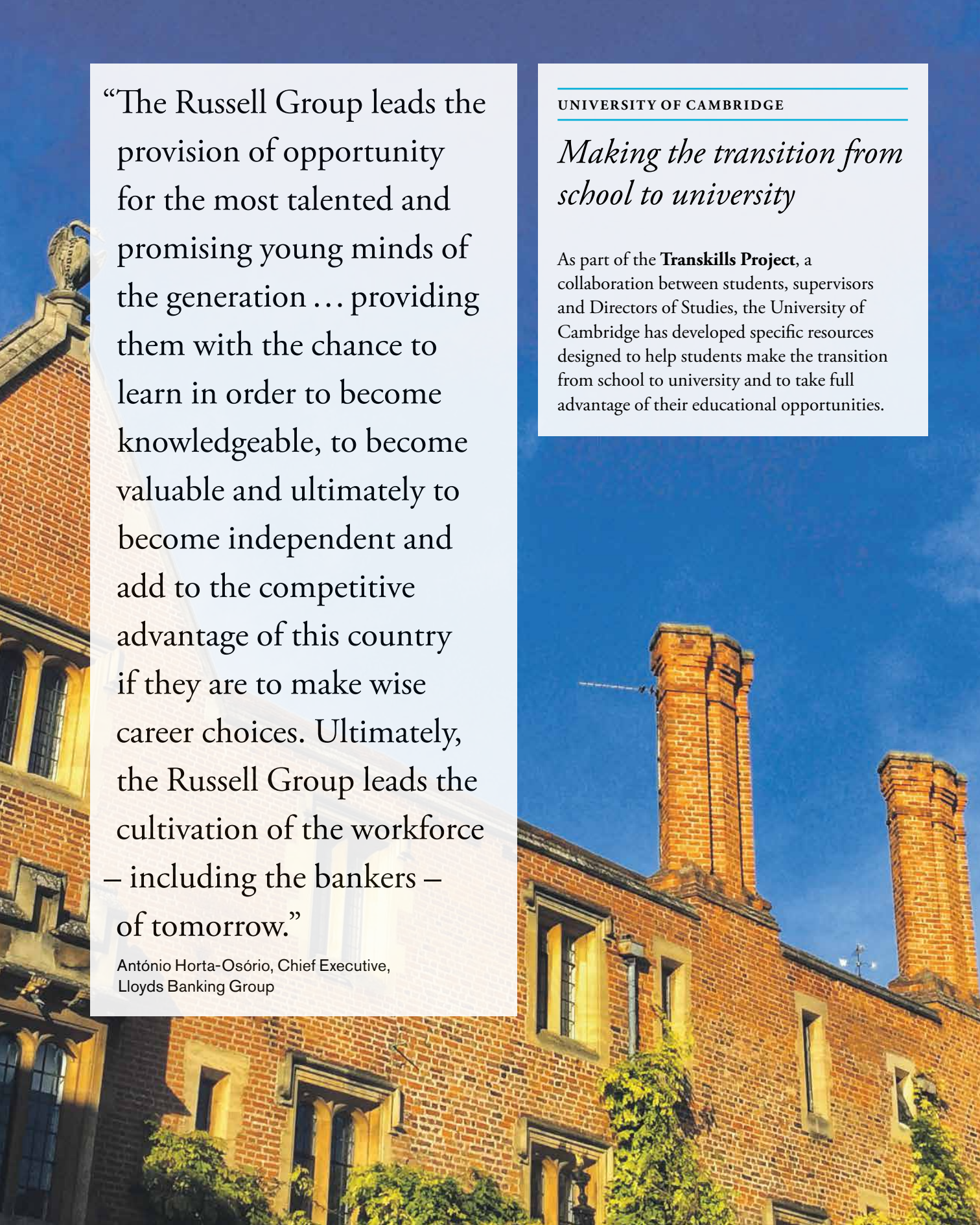
Independent learning

Taking responsibility for their own learning helps students to understand their own learning styles and needs, developing their confidence, problem-solving and organisational abilities, as well as other characteristics such as being enterprising and entrepreneurial. These skills are valuable as part of each student's personal development, and also in the workplace where they help to equip graduates for future leadership roles and enhance their employability.

Research by the National Union of Students (NUS) in 2008³ found that while students "find the process of autonomous learning difficult, they do find it satisfying". The report also found that many students use existing structured learning to provide 'cues' for private study, suggesting that students are successfully engaging with the concept of independent learning and are using academic support to assist them in pursuing their course of study.

Personal tutors

Independent learning is supported by a commitment across all Russell Group universities to provide our students with access to high-quality personal tutor systems: they are central to the learning experiences and essential to the success and wellbeing of every student. In fact, the individual academic and welfare support provided by personal tutors has been identified as one of the defining characteristics of UK higher education when compared to the systems in place in many other countries.⁴



“The Russell Group leads the provision of opportunity for the most talented and promising young minds of the generation ... providing them with the chance to learn in order to become knowledgeable, to become valuable and ultimately to become independent and add to the competitive advantage of this country if they are to make wise career choices. Ultimately, the Russell Group leads the cultivation of the workforce – including the bankers – of tomorrow.”

António Horta-Osório, Chief Executive,
Lloyds Banking Group

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Making the transition from school to university

As part of the **Transkills Project**, a collaboration between students, supervisors and Directors of Studies, the University of Cambridge has developed specific resources designed to help students make the transition from school to university and to take full advantage of their educational opportunities.

*University of Warwick
students talking about their
postgraduate teachers:*

“An inspirational tutor
and lecturer who motivates
students through his
personal approach
to teaching.”

“I never left a seminar
feeling unsure or confused
about the subject.”

“The group is constantly
occupied in animated
debate with a lively
discussion surrounding
what can be an incredibly
difficult subject.”

“The quality and usefulness
of his essay feedback is the
best I have had.”⁵



Personal development planning

Independent learning is further enhanced in many Russell Group universities by the use of tools such as personal development planning (PDP), which is typically described as: “a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development.”⁶

Growing numbers of universities are developing electronic portfolios to support student and tutor engagement in PDP. One example of this is LUSID,⁷ the University of Liverpool’s online PDP tool, which supports a wide range of activities across the institution for both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Quality and quantity of contact time

Earlier in this section, we explained how personal tutors help give academic and pastoral support to students and how universities help students make the transition from school to university and teach them the skills needed for independent learning. It is still vital we also provide high-quality contact time that gives students the frameworks, guidance and feedback they need to be actively engaged with their subject, and to make the most out of their independent

study time. We have some of the highest staff to student ratios in the sector⁸ making our universities well placed to deliver an excellent and meaningful learning experience.

Contact time – how useful a measure is it in isolation?

Much has been made in the media and in policy discussion about the amount of scheduled teaching time students receive during their time at university. The Key Information Sets (KIS), first published in autumn 2012, include information on the amount of scheduled learning and teaching time for each undergraduate programme of study. However, while KIS present a lot of useful information to prospective students, it is important to understand that the volume of contact hours is not a proxy for quality.

The amount of contact time a student receives will vary according to the level of study, subject studied and the individual approach taken by each university. Different disciplines – and even different modules within disciplines – will require different ways of learning appropriate to the subject; something that a single ‘contact hours’ measure may not fully capture. Subjects requiring laboratory time will typically need more contact hours, but the same approach would not necessarily be appropriate for students in many arts and humanities subjects.

Personal tutors play a vital role in making students feel part of the Russell Group university community. They help students with their academic and personal development needs; they ensure that feedback is understood and acted upon; and they assist student retention and progression.

Russell Group universities encourage all applicants to spend as much time as they can researching their options and looking beyond the KIS data at university websites, prospectuses and other publications, and through attendance at university open days and interviews. In relation to teaching and learning, applicants may want to find out about

- the group size for their course

- the range of teaching methods that will be deployed, from small group work to lectures

- whether the course includes an industry placement

- whether students are encouraged to consider a period of study abroad or to learn a new language to enhance their employability.

Many senior lecturers operate an 'open door' policy for students to get help and advice outside lectures or tutorials. The KIS data cannot fully capture this type of engagement, yet it is valued by students who rate the quality and diversity of their experience at Russell Group universities very highly.

Contact with a wide variety of staff

The extensive research communities which exist in Russell Group universities enable students to engage with a wide variety of staff in different roles. Integrating students into these communities and providing them with access to professors and other leading academics, as well as to some of the best new researchers, is a key element of our learning experiences and can have considerable benefits.

Postgraduate students who undertake teaching duties can draw on their own cutting-edge research activities and personal experiences as researchers to teach with authenticity and enthusiasm. They are often highly regarded by the undergraduates they teach, who may view postgraduate researchers as more approachable as they will have been undergraduates themselves fairly recently.

The experience of learning within a high-achieving peer group

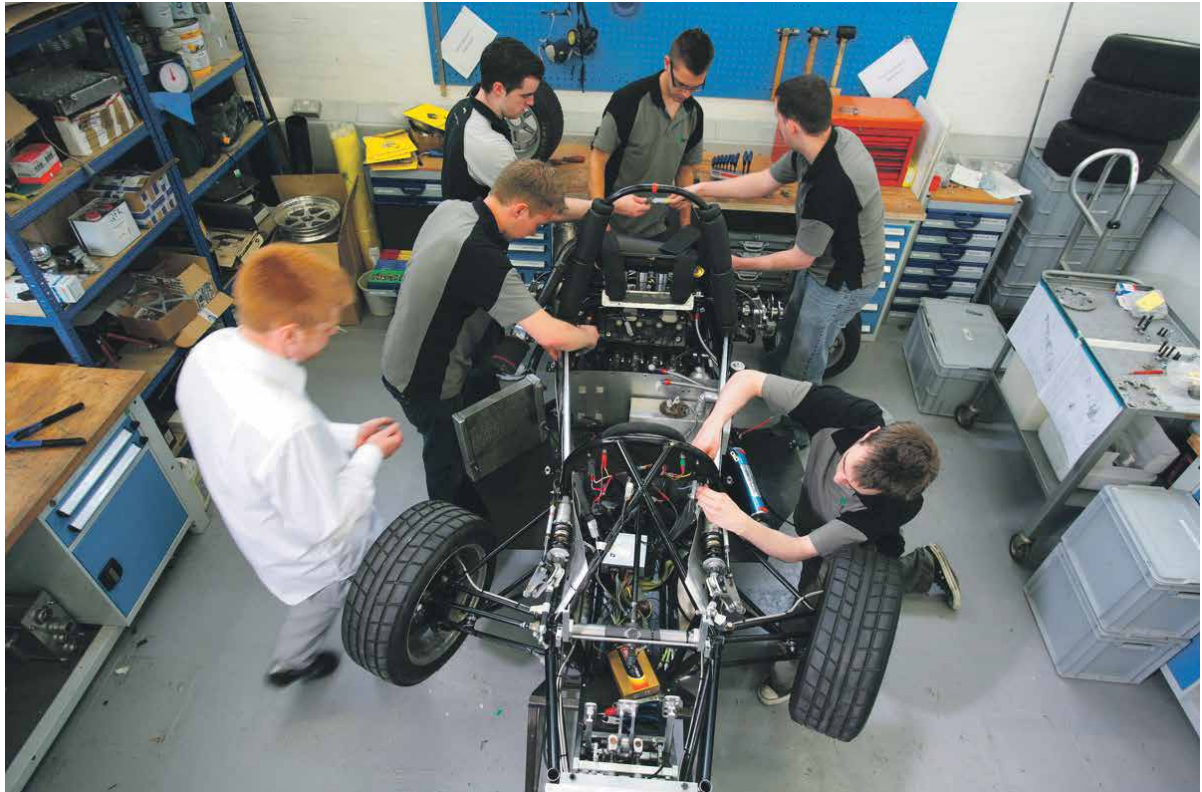
Places at Russell Group universities are in high demand⁹ and attract some of the most talented, best-qualified applicants. Our students' learning experiences are enhanced by being part of a high achieving and intellectually curious peer group; fellow students will be amongst the best in the world, highly motivated to learn and keen to be part of a global community of scholars.¹⁰ This learning experience is further enriched by the presence of many full-time postgraduate students.

The *NUS Student Experience Report*¹¹ highlighted the importance for students of being able to discuss and collaborate on their study – what the report calls “valuable horizontal (peer-to-peer) learning”. The report also noted that “the contact which students often value particularly highly is the time they spend with their peers” and that “collaborating with other students” is the second most popular factor (after an inspirational lecturer) in motivating students to learn. Peer contact and the sense of being part of a learning community is an important dimension of the Russell Group undergraduate and postgraduate experience.

LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS &
POLITICAL SCIENCE (LSE)

Thinking like a social scientist

LSE100 introduces first-year undergraduates at LSE to the fundamental elements of thinking like a social scientist. Focusing on questions such as ‘How should we manage climate change?’, ‘Does culture matter?’ and ‘Why are great events so difficult to predict?’, LSE100 students explore the different approaches to evidence, explanation and theory that are used in the different social sciences.¹²



More than a third of all full-time postgraduates in the UK study at Russell Group universities.

The experience of learning in a research-intensive environment

In Section 1, we demonstrated how the research-intensive nature of Russell Group universities plays a major part in developing a distinctive and ideal learning environment for students. Crucially, bringing together the dual activities of research, and teaching and learning within the same institution offers significant and tangible additional benefits to our students which will help them take their thinking to a new level and develop skills they need for a wide range of careers. But this does not happen automatically; it requires academics and universities to take proactive steps to bring them together.

In Russell Group universities, there is a significant concentration of research-active academic staff: not only are our academics experts in their field, but they are also ideally placed to teach up-to-date material with enthusiasm and authority.

There are significant benefits for students in grounding their learning in a culture of research and inquiry, which is strengthened by involving expert academic staff in teaching. Not least of these benefits is the focus on students becoming active participants in the production of knowledge, rather than passive recipients or consumers.



The benefits of co-locating research activity and teaching activity in the same university include:

- the ability to attract talented staff and students from around the world who form a learning community focused on the pursuit of excellence
- the chance for students to learn from academics who are actively engaged in research
- the opportunity for students to learn about and participate in the research process
- access to excellent learning and teaching resources that also support world leading research.

Some have disputed the benefits that research can bring to teaching or argued there is an adverse impact. Providing hard and fast evidence on the relationship between research and teaching is challenging and fraught with methodological problems. So describing and measuring the influence of research on teaching is complex.

A great deal of work has been undertaken in the UK and internationally to explore how research and teaching are linked in universities. A number of studies took an empirical approach, seeking to measure a correlation between the quality of research and the quality of teaching. But these studies were often limited by the availability of data and results varied widely, producing either positive, negative or zero correlation.¹³ This suggests the teaching–research nexus is more complex than can be readily measured with existing data.

However, there is evidence of a correlation between research excellence and student satisfaction in the UK: in an analysis comparing Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) scores with National Student Survey (NSS) results, students in departments with the highest RAE scores (grades 5 or 5*) were found to be more positive about their overall satisfaction with the course, and were also more positive about five of the six areas covered in the survey.¹⁴ This pattern is repeated in the results for each of the three years of NSS results covered by the study.

A number of education researchers have focused on how the links between research and teaching can be actively fostered. For example, one expert argues that “the issue is whether lecturers adopt teaching approaches that are likely to foster student experiences that mirror the lecturers’ experiences as researchers.”¹⁵ Another report, which focuses on undergraduate research and inquiry, seeks to identify the different ways that research links to teaching and learning. The authors name four different types of relationship:

- learning about current research in the discipline (research-led)
- developing research skills and techniques (research-oriented)

- undertaking research and inquiry (research-based)
 - engaging in research discussions (research-tutored).¹⁶
-

This list underlines that research and teaching are linked in many different ways, so engagement with research can take place at any stage of a degree programme.

Proactively bringing teaching and research together

The strategies developed by our universities reflect the importance of the interrelationship of teaching and research within our institutions, and actively seek to bring these two areas together to achieve the maximum benefit for students. For example:

- The University of Leeds describes how it translates excellence in research and scholarship into learning opportunities for students as follows: “the structure and content of our programmes are such that all our taught students have the opportunity throughout their studies to learn about, and participate in, the research process and to understand how new knowledge is created. This might include, for example, students’ own supervised projects, work with staff on aspects of the latter’s research, case studies, solving real-life problems, and the use of relevant/ industry-based applications.”¹⁷
 - The University of Southampton talks about its “distinctive student-centred, research-led approach to its educational provision. This involves progressive movement towards a model of programme design that facilitates students learning as close as possible to the research experience.”
-

These strategic commitments to bringing research, and teaching and learning together are delivered in many different ways by Russell Group universities. For example:

- At the University of Exeter, all first-year undergraduates are encouraged to participate in Grand Challenges. This programme provides the opportunity for students to work in interdisciplinary research groups with access to the university’s top academics, along with inspirational world-leading experts, to produce solutions and ideas addressing some of the key dilemmas of the 21st century.¹⁸
-

- Several Russell Group universities have long-established programmes, often known as Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programmes (UROPs), that enable undergraduates to be involved in research opportunities. The UROP at Imperial College London was established in 1980 and has provided research opportunities to over 4,000 students, many of whom have gone on to develop careers in research. Students provide a wealth of positive feedback about their experiences, such as the following perspective from a second year undergraduate in Biomedical Sciences:

“The nature of my placement meant I was never doing the same thing in one place and so I gained a variety of skills. If I wasn’t in the lab carrying out contractility studies, I was using special analysis software or on labour wards and even managed to watch a few Caesareans! Of course another big bonus was getting to meet so many people, from Masters students to Consultants, who kindly shared their experiences helping me to make my own career decisions. My UROP experience has reassured me to continue studying science and hopefully pursue a career dedicated to research.”¹⁹

Russell Group universities continue to develop the academic and research experience they offer students to maximise the benefits of learning in a research-intensive institution.

- At the University of Warwick, undergraduate students have the opportunity to publish their work in *Reinvention: a Journal of Undergraduate Research*. As a participant on the Undergraduate Research Scholarship Scheme notes:

“It doesn’t matter if you want to be a researcher or not, the skills you gain are always going to be valued in any future career you undertake.”²⁰

In some disciplines, a close relationship between researchers and leading professionals also provides students with privileged access to the very latest practice. One particular example is medical students at Russell Group universities who are able to gain experience of research at the academic–clinical interface through teaching in university hospitals, with first-hand exposure to the application of research in a clinical setting. Such experiences also deliver first-hand experience of innovation in research and application and of how knowledge is transferred from universities and researchers.

The power of research to create learning experiences

Russell Group universities are committed to harnessing cutting-edge research to develop engaging learning experiences for students. For example: mechanical engineering students at the University of Birmingham have the opportunity to put their learning to the test by working on race cars, and there are numerous examples of enterprise education at Russell Group universities.

Thanks to the wide range of subjects and disciplines available for study, our universities are also able to offer valuable cross-disciplinary opportunities.

This enables students to take modules and courses not directly related to their field of study or to study specialist topics in great depth, enriching their learning experience.

Particular benefits for postgraduate students

For postgraduate research students, the experience of studying at a research-intensive university brings particular advantages, such as:

- access to the expensive and specialist facilities required for many projects
- more opportunities for peer contact with other research students
- informal networking with academic staff
- the right training and support to help students fulfil their potential as researchers.

An established body of literature highlights that PhD students benefit from studying at research-intensive universities where there is a critical mass of talent, infrastructure and leading thinkers in the field:

- Research into UK skills needs has identified that “to support research and innovation countries need a sizeable but not vast number of top-class, superbly trained researchers and developers, not a very large number of imperfectly trained ones”.²¹
- Funding policies of the Research Councils emphasise the importance of a well-funded environment in awarding doctoral funding, and other funding bodies such as the Wellcome Trust stress the importance of doctoral students being

UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

Establishing student and university rights and responsibilities

Manchester's **student charter**, which is jointly signed by the Vice-Chancellor and General Secretary of the Students' Union, covers the learning experience, personal and academic development, communication, mutual respect and being part of the local community. It also defines shared commitments and expectations of the roles that will be played by students and the university.

UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

Embedding entrepreneurship in the curriculum

Final-year students in the Faculty of Engineering have the option to take the award-winning '**technology strategy and business planning**' module. This introduces "concept, strategy, and techniques behind a business plan based on the exploitation or development of identified technological opportunities". In reality, it fosters collaboration between students and technology users, with student ideas being developed into prototypes and functional products, often in life-changing applications such as a walking frame for children with brittle bones, now being used by children's hospitals across the UK.



educated in “well-funded research environments where superior facilities, training opportunities and scientific mentoring would be available to them”.²²

-
- A report on the future of doctoral training in Europe recommends that “in order to provide a fertile research experience, doctoral training should be concentrated in research-intensive environments where excellence is fostered. This can be in single institutions or in collaborating groups of institutions.”²³
-
- Research shows that institutions which successfully educate and award large numbers of doctoral degrees also generate a larger volume of research outputs, file more patents and secure more income from licensing their intellectual property.²⁴ This is likely to be because larger, research-intensive universities have the capacity to offer doctoral students comprehensive support and training, and to systematically identify and exploit their intellectual property.²⁵
-
- Lord Rees, former President of the Royal Society, has also stated on a number of occasions the need to ensure that the training of PhDs should take place in departments or research groups where there is a strong research base in the appropriate discipline.

At Russell Group universities many research students now benefit from studying within a doctoral training centre. These multi-disciplinary centres are accredited by the relevant Research Council as centres of excellence in research and postgraduate training. They bring together various areas of expertise and offer unique opportunities and a dynamic environment for PhD student training.

An overall learning experience that develops the ideal mix of graduate attributes and skills

The research-intensive environment within Russell Group universities encourages students to develop a ‘deep’ approach to learning.²⁶ This approach

emphasises longer-term understanding and meaning, underpinned by the application of concepts and principles. It also encourages the development of a wide range of the skills and attributes which equip graduates to be lifelong learners and effective citizens, and to take on demanding roles and tasks.

What employers look for in graduates

The skills and attributes of Russell Group graduates include critical and original thinking, problem solving, and a range of high-level oral and written communication skills. Such skills are valuable for employment: they help people to make crucial decisions, to develop new ideas or products and to perform in complex environments. Research into the views of employers, including both small and large businesses, has highlighted the additional attributes they seek in graduates, including ‘deep’ intellectual capabilities as well as communication skills (86%), team-working skills (85%), confidence (80%), planning and organisational skills (74%) and analysis and decision-making skills (67%).²⁷

Building skills through co-curricular activities

There are lots of opportunities for students at Russell Group universities to extend or add to their skills by participating in extra-curricular activities, which are often now described as co-curricular activities. The change in terminology from ‘extra’ to ‘co’ reflects that this activity is increasingly being regarded as an integral part of the student experience. Its importance is being more fully recognised by students themselves, their universities and employers, as these activities present the opportunity for students to develop employability skills in areas such as verbal communication, organisation and project management.

There is evidence of the difference that taking part in co-curricular activities can make for students from the Futuretrack survey, which followed undergraduates who applied to enter university in autumn 2006, through to their activity in 2011–12. The study clearly shows that “graduates who took part in extra-curricular activities, and those who were office holders, were less likely to be unemployed, and more likely to be employed in a graduate job. This demonstrates the value employers place on such

“I’ve gained a lot of practical skills in terms of teamwork, leadership and organisation. When you get quite a few deadlines set in a relatively short space of time it teaches you very quickly to manage your time. Also on the academic front, it’s really helped me to become more disciplined, to become more independent and do things myself.”²⁸

Student at the University of Leeds

activities as a means of demonstrating desirable characteristics, such as teamwork and leadership, and in particular the value placed on these activities by employers recruiting in areas of traditional graduate employment.”²⁹

Enabling graduates to communicate their skills and attributes

Students must be supported to develop a wide range of skills through academic and co-curricular activities. But, for their own personal development and in order to ‘sell themselves’ to potential employers, they must also be able to recognise and articulate those skills.

Our universities support students in this area in a range of different ways. For example:

- The University of Glasgow has developed a skills matrix based around ten key attributes, identifying the academic, personal and transferable aspects of each attribute.
- Many universities are introducing the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) to provide further opportunities for recognising the acquisition of skills and attributes, as well as verifying students’ co-curricular achievements and awards.
- Several of our universities offer specific awards to recognise students’ wider achievements, attributes and skills.

Opportunities to gain real-life work experience

For many students, a key aspect of developing employability skills is the chance to gain first-hand experience of the workplace during their studies. Many degree courses at Russell Group universities incorporate work placements as a central part of the learning experience. Even where these are not a credit-bearing aspect of the programme, students are encouraged to take placements to develop their understanding of academic knowledge. For example:

- The University of Manchester offers its law students a workplace experience that also benefits the local community
- University of Liverpool Law School students offer pro bono legal advice under the supervision of professionally qualified legal practitioners
- The University of Warwick offers a bursary scheme for work experience
- The University of Birmingham offers opportunities for placements with industry partners.

Many students also get the opportunity to spend a period of study or work abroad which presents a valuable chance to develop language skills. This is rewarding in its own right and is also a key employability skill.

IMPERIAL COLLEGE LONDON

Enhancing the postgraduate experience

In collaboration with the UK Research Councils, other universities and charities, Imperial College's five **doctoral training centres** provide comprehensive training for postgraduates in fields as diverse as plastic electronics, chemical biology and energy futures. As well as high-quality training in research, students receive training in multidisciplinary, transferable skills and outreach activities. Imperial is now learning from the success of these centres to improve training for all postgraduate research students.

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Encouraging students to develop, reflect upon and articulate their skills

The University of Birmingham **Personal Skills Award (PSA)** offers undergraduate students two pathways:

- the Modular Pathway, allowing students to take accredited assessed modules in transferable skills
- the Active Pathway, recognising participation in extra-curricular activities which develop employability.

The award has been recognised as a leader in its field, winning the Association of Graduate Recruiters' (AGR) award for Graduate Development Preparation in Higher Education. In making its award, the AGR highlighted the quality and robust nature of the PSA's design as a key feature of the programme.



“Coming back with a language for a start is brilliant. If you can adapt to a foreign situation and create a new life somewhere else in a year, you’re gaining so much experience from that. You’re maturing a lot and so that when you graduate, moving off into the real world of work is easier. I’d recommend it to anyone really. Also I’m so much more of a dedicated student because I’ve gone away and come back. I’ve been outside and had a look around and now I’ve come back motivated and I really want to do well for this final year. I feel refreshed.”³⁰

Student at the University of Leeds

Developing postgraduate skills

At postgraduate level, Russell Group universities clearly articulate the skills, education and training which our PhD students will develop and how these relate to a range of future career options. We are also keen to provide postgraduate education in an international context and are increasingly developing strategic partnerships with overseas universities and research centres to offer a broader, cross-cultural learning experience.

The Russell Group learning experience ... in our students’ own words

Student satisfaction at Russell Group universities is high. In the 2013 National Student Survey (NSS), the average score for Russell Group universities was 88% compared to the national average of 85%. Specific areas where the Russell Group out-performed the sector as a whole included: the quality of teaching and intellectual stimulation; organisation and management; and the provision of high-quality learning resources.³¹

In addition to UK data, data from a survey of international students demonstrates that Russell Group universities perform well against their international competitors on almost all the aspects of student experience most valued by international students, such as good teaching, course content, and expert lecturers.³²

International students are typically very positive about their experiences at Russell Group universities. In recent surveys:

- 89% of those graduating in 2010 were satisfied with their learning experience, rising to 92% of those graduating two years earlier.
- 82% (2010) thought their UK degree was worth the financial investment, rising to 84% for those graduating two years earlier.
- 87% (2010) would recommend their university to someone else, rising to 89% for the 2008 cohort, and compared to 81% for international graduates of other UK universities.³³

Another longer-term indicator of student satisfaction is provided by alumni, who are increasingly staying in touch with their university. Their contributions include financial donations and other forms of participation such as mentoring current students. These activities will be discussed further in Section 3 and provide another indicator that Russell Group graduates have a positive attitude towards their student experience.

Reacting to improve lower-scoring areas of the learning experience

While there are many strong indicators that overall levels of student satisfaction are high at Russell Group universities, there are areas that have required particular attention. In particular, the NSS questions about feedback have received lower scores than other areas, perhaps because frequency and style of feedback tends to be quite different at university than at school, and modules and re-sits mean students are used to a constant feedback loop. Universities have responded to this, taking steps to understand more about why this pattern of scores occurs and how improvements can be made. As a result, between 2008 and 2013, the average satisfaction rate for students at Russell Group universities on each of the questions about feedback improved as follows:

- 'Feedback on my work has been prompt' – satisfaction increased by 11.8%.

- 'I have received detailed comments on my work' – satisfaction increased by 11.7%.

- 'Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand' – satisfaction increased by 9.9%.³⁴

It will remain important for our universities to continue to focus on these areas in order to secure greater improvements for the future.

Gathering our own course feedback

Of course, we do not rely on external surveys to tell us what our students think. The views of all Russell Group students are systematically collected throughout their courses, not just at the end of their degrees. This helps our universities to monitor, review and improve the quality of the learning experience

and other services they provide. Students and students' unions are increasingly active participants in this process.

Along with the more traditional ways of gathering student feedback, our universities are increasingly making use of other tools, such as electronic voting systems, to gather immediate responses from students. To date, over 100 lecturers and 2,400 students at the University of Edinburgh have used handheld response systems (clickers) to promote interactive engagement and to identify further ways to improve the learning experience.

Conclusion: The Russell Group learning experience asks a lot of our students, but delivers a lot in return

Our students learn to think creatively and analytically; to be independent-minded but evidence-based; to be confident in challenging received wisdom but willing to learn from experience; and to communicate complex ideas clearly and simply.

At Russell Group universities we aspire to deliver learning experiences that are distinctive and world class. Our aim is to equip our graduates with the detailed subject knowledge that will lead to academic excellence, and our universities are environments where students have access to some of the leading thinking in diverse disciplines. Students will also be motivated by studying alongside their peers who have been selected from the top percentage of university applicants for their academic achievement, intellectual curiosity and passion for their subject. But we also understand the importance of developing those attributes and broader skills that employers value, and that give Russell Group university graduates the edge. ■

The Russell Group learning experience

- The opportunity to develop the skills to tackle a wide range of future work and life challenges
- World-class academic teaching and support to build in-depth subject knowledge and become an independent, motivated learner
- Exposure to some of the latest thinking in an international, research-intensive learning community of academic experts and high-achieving student peers

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

Gathering and acting on student feedback

At Southampton, student feedback is collected in a variety of ways, including **internal and external surveys**. The university has also commissioned the Students in Free Enterprise society (SIFE) to gather in-depth feedback via **focus groups and interviews** with students at all levels of study. Results from this project and other findings are systematically reported to students, including any actions taken in response to feedback.

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

Actively involving students in the development and running of the university

At Exeter, the **Students as Change Agents initiative** provides a framework for students to be actively involved in the development, running and advancement of the university. Students identify a part of their university experience that could be improved and then carry out research on how best to make an improvement. The solution they propose is ideally implemented, or at least considered, by the university.

Section 3



Giving graduates the best chance of success in the wider world

The benefits of a Russell Group education do not end with graduation. Our graduates go on to rewarding and demanding careers, and many continue to make their mark in the academic world through further postgraduate study.

In Sections 1 and 2, we focused on the well-resourced learning environment and excellent learning experiences offered by Russell Group universities. In this final section, we explore the opportunities our graduates have, and the impact they make, in the wider world.

Recognising that the reasons for studying at university are not just financial or career orientated, we also consider the broader advantages, both to our individual graduates throughout their lives and to society as a whole. These are harder to measure, but there are good indicators that all university graduates are more likely to be happier and healthier, and to be active citizens within their communities.

Achieving academic success

More students finish their degree courses at Russell Group universities than elsewhere in the UK. Russell Group undergraduates are also more likely to achieve excellent degree results.

In addition, research-intensive universities play important roles in educating the next generation of researchers, scientists and academics. Research by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI)¹ has shown that first-degree graduates from research-intensive universities are more likely to progress directly to postgraduate study and, in particular, to postgraduate research study which is in itself a requirement for many demanding careers.

Going on to rewarding careers and further study

Most students view higher education as an important route to a professional career as well as further, advanced study. A Russell Group university education puts our graduates in an excellent position for both.

The competitive edge

The annual Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey provides a snapshot of UK and EU graduates' progress six months after graduation. While this is still very early in a graduate's career, data for Russell Group institutions shows that:

- 93% of first-degree graduates are in employment or study six months after graduation

- 93% of masters students are in employment or study six months after graduation
- 96% of doctoral students are in employment or study six months after graduation.²

The DLHE longitudinal survey shows that for UK students who graduated from Russell Group universities with an undergraduate degree in 2007, more than 95% were in work or further study three and a half years later.³

Doctoral graduates in particular are likely to be looking for work in a global market and must be able to compete with those graduating from other leading institutions around the world. Our doctoral programmes develop students with internationally competitive skills who are able to tackle research challenges in new and creative ways. Doctoral students also gain an understanding of how advanced research contributes to business and wider society, making them highly attractive to key employers.

Enhanced earning power

Data shows that Russell Group graduates are more likely to earn a higher salary than the sector average. The DLHE longitudinal survey of 2006–07 UK and EU graduates three and half years after graduation⁴ shows that Russell Group graduates cluster towards

the top end of the salary bands being used. Over 41% of Russell Group respondents (compared to a sector average of 32%) were earning an annual salary of £30,000 or more: this included the largest proportion of graduates in the sector who were earning above £50,000 (6.6% compared to a sector average of 4.4%).

A recent study by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills found that a degree from a Russell Group university has a very positive impact on lifetime earnings. It found a lifetime 'earnings premium' of 16% for men (9% for women) who had graduated from a Russell Group university, compared to graduates from a 'new' university.⁵

Greater career satisfaction

Career satisfaction is also higher amongst Russell Group graduates than the rest of the sector:

- Nearly 87% were very or fairly satisfied with their career to date, compared to 83% amongst graduates from other institutions.
- Just under 80% reported that their HE experience had prepared them very well or quite well to progress towards achieving their career aspirations, compared to 75% amongst graduates of other institutions.⁶

Data from HESA shows that first-degree graduates from Russell Group universities achieve higher proportions of firsts and 2:1 degrees than the sector average.⁷

80% of PhD students at Russell Group universities successfully complete their doctoral studies, compared to 69% at other UK universities.⁸

A recent study found that men who graduate from Russell Group universities earn on average 16% more in their lifetime than those who graduate from a new university. For women the figure is 9% more.⁹

Diverse opportunities

Russell Group degrees open up a wide variety of interesting and diverse opportunities, with our graduates more likely to enter some of the most prestigious and influential professions including law, politics and journalism.¹⁰ Russell Group graduates also dominate the medical professions, with three-quarters of the nation's doctors and dentists coming from our universities.

In addition to these well-trodden career paths, our graduates have a wide range of other career options open to them and are well equipped to tackle some of the most demanding graduate jobs across the full range of employment sectors. Many of our international graduates go on to achieve senior positions in their home countries or in the UK. They also tend to achieve markedly higher salaries than the average for graduates in their home country.

As well as taking up jobs in large organisations or joining small- or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), Russell Group graduates have a strong and exciting tradition of setting up their own companies; following their dreams and making their mark in diverse sectors, from finance to food. Here are just a few examples of Russell Group graduates who have gone on to become successful entrepreneurs:

- LSE graduate Arif Naqvi founded The Abraaj Group, a multi-billion dollar private equity investor.
- Queen Mary University of London graduate Priya Lakhani established Masala Masala in 2008 which now sells cooking sauces in over 30 countries.
- Durham graduate Richard Adams founded Traidcraft which sells fairly traded products sourced from around the world in the UK.
- Cambridge graduates Richard Reed, Adam Balon and Jon Wright created the Innocent drinks brand.
- Nicholas Charles Tyrwhitt Wheeler had the idea for Charles Tyrwhitt shirts in 1986 while studying geography at the University of Bristol.
- Film fan Colin Needham founded the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) shortly after leaving the University of Leeds, where he studied computer science.

A 2011 survey of alumni of the University of Oxford¹¹ generated over 15,000 responses from the institution's graduates about their subsequent employment. It found that education was the most popular employment sector (with over 30% of responses) followed by consultancy (17%), research (16%) and the public sector (14%). The Oxford brand was seen as an important aspect of career success, particularly in the early years, along with the subject studied and the support provided by the tutorial system.¹²

What employers think of our graduates

Russell Group graduates are highly sought after by employers, both nationally and internationally. The benefits of a Russell Group education are recognised by many graduate employers, who as a result directly target our universities in their recruitment activities.

Graduates reflecting on the value of a Russell Group degree

“It was a requirement for my current position to have at least a Bachelors degree in either Engineering or Physics – doing the full Masters wasn’t essential, but it’s been an advantage and given me more transferable skills. Whilst a lot of what I do is project management, my degree is crucial in helping me to understand the equipment that I’m working on and to make engineering decisions.”

2006 MEng graduate in Electrical Engineering working as a graduate engineer

“My job involves a lot of translation, so the language part of my degree is very relevant. A degree in communications or languages was a requirement for my job, as well as advanced Spanish skills.”

2007 BA graduate in Spanish and Portuguese working in international development in South America

“My specific degree was not a requirement for my job, but a numerical degree was asked for. It has proved VERY useful in my job and new course. The reputation of my uni contributed to me getting the job, I think.”

2009 BSc graduate in Mathematics working in transport planning

“My Bachelors degree was a requirement for my position, and I’ve found myself utilising skills such as organisation and time management that I learnt at university. Plus, the Chinese know a lot about ‘famous’ English universities and were certainly impressed that I attended one.”

2006 BA graduate in History working as an English language teacher in China

“Although a PhD isn’t always necessary, I think that patent firms often prefer to employ trainees who have either a PhD or some industrial experience. To be a patent attorney, it’s important to be able to express yourself clearly and to be willing to apply yourself to learning large amounts of patent law, as well as to have a good understanding of science and a good attention to detail. I’m sure that the transferable skills acquired through a PhD (through writing a thesis, giving talks, and spending endless hours analysing results, etc.) are undoubtedly useful.”

2007 PhD graduate in Chemistry working as a patent attorney

“I would say that it was a 50/50 split between the academic value of my degree against the value of extra-curricular activities that I took part in (particularly volunteering with Student Community Action and Bristol Volunteers for Development Abroad), which earned me a place with Teach First.”

2010 MSc graduate in Geography working as a Mathematics teacher via the Teach First scheme

Russell Group students also benefit from the established links between our university careers services and key employers. Our universities invest heavily in their careers services which offer a wide range of services for students and graduates including individual advice sessions, events, careers fairs and internships and work experience programmes. Looking at just one example of many, the University of Leeds offers a wide range of support services for employers looking to recruit its graduates. These include a number of sector-specific recruitment fairs, including:

- Bright Sparks Fair – a chance to meet numerate students, hosted by the School of Mathematics
- Expo Fair – an interactive day of talks and workshops aimed at Faculty of Arts students looking for an inspirational career
- Bioscience Networking Event – an opportunity for employers to meet enthusiastic bioscience students and raise awareness of career opportunities in a relaxed atmosphere
- Careers... Making a Difference Fair – attracts around 1,500 students from all disciplines who want to work in non-profit making, ethical and voluntary jobs, or in the public sector.

Employer involvement and work placements

More and more, employers are getting involved on a regular basis in advising on professional content within Russell Group university degrees. This includes formal accreditation of programmes in professional subject areas as well as more informal engagement via advisory boards.

Employers are also increasingly keen to offer opportunities for work placements, mentoring or participation in real-life projects. These give students the chance to find out more about career options and what employers are looking for in their new recruits. Employers also benefit from seeing potential new staff in real work environments.



In 2012–13, nine of the ten universities visited by the largest number of graduate employers were from the Russell Group.¹³

Six Russell Group universities are in the world's top 13 universities as ranked by an international survey of graduate recruiters.¹⁴

This benefits graduates when they come to look for employment. The High Fliers 2013 review of the graduate market¹⁵ highlights the importance of relevant work experience for leading employers. Over half of responding employers stated that it was either 'not very likely' or 'not at all likely' that a graduate with no previous work experience (whether with them or another organisation) would be successful during their selection process and be made a job offer. The report also noted that around 36% of graduate vacancies in 2012–13 would be filled by applicants who had already worked for the employer as an undergraduate – in some sectors the proportion increased to 50% or more.

At the postgraduate level, many students undertake research projects and training in partnership with businesses and other employers. Evidence suggests that a number of successful students are offered jobs with these employers upon graduation.

Producing sought-after STEM graduates

Graduates in the strategically important science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines have a real opportunity to benefit from the fact that skills in these areas are in short supply nationally. Those who can demonstrate good

subject knowledge and key employability skills are increasingly sought after by employers and have a chance to choose between a range of exciting career options.

Russell Group graduates and postgraduates are meeting a significant proportion of the demand for high-quality STEM graduates. The 2012 CBI/Pearson Education and Skills survey¹⁶ found that among those employers that need STEM skills, 42% currently have difficulties in recruiting to STEM jobs and nearly half expect to encounter difficulties in the next three years.

Developing rounded individuals and confident citizens

University should do more than equip graduates to be successful in their careers or further study. It also provides a range of broader benefits to individuals and to society. In recent years, there have been several international studies by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which suggest that those with higher-level qualifications are more likely to be healthy, happy with their lives and to engage in civic activities.

“An individual’s engagement in society and perceived health conditions appear to vary across different levels of educational attainment, even after accounting for age, gender and income differences. This suggests that education may have an impact on these outcomes by raising skills and abilities, although other factors related to the choice of education may also be at play.”¹⁷

OECD *Education at a Glance* report

DURHAM UNIVERSITY

Employer perspectives on our graduates

“We have accepted many excellent Durham graduates onto the Teach First programme. The quality of applications that we have coming through from Durham students and graduates is consistently high and they go on to perform excellently on our challenging and demanding scheme.”

Celia Staton, Graduate Recruitment Officer, Teach First

“Our experience is that Durham University graduates from all degree disciplines demonstrate the academic capability to succeed within our profession. They also have had the opportunity whilst at university to develop their communication and teamworking skills, amongst others, through the wealth of activities and opportunities that the university and the collegiate system provides its students. This allows PwC to benefit from having students who help meet the demands of our ever-changing business environment.”

**Andrew Bargery, Graduate and Schools Recruitment,
North Region, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP**

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Bringing employers and students together through work experience opportunities

The **Club 21 Internship Programme** is a work experience programme based at the University of Glasgow Careers Service. It provides employers with the opportunity to recruit interns from the university, and gives participating students the opportunity to add greater value to their degree through real-world experience and work-related learning. Over 200 employers are involved, ranging from blue chip organisations to local charities, SMEs and the University of Glasgow itself.

Working with the employers, the Careers Service ensures that all work experience opportunities offered are structured and address particular business needs and objectives. As part of their experience, students are asked to complete a learning diary, which encourages them to reflect on the skills they have developed and the benefits they have gained from participating.

Putting graduates in touch with alumni for mentoring

UCL's **Alumni Mentoring Network** is a web-based facility through which graduates can contact UCL alumni to gain an insight into the realities of working in specific professions, based on their experiences: they can give the inside track on what they enjoy about their job, the challenges and how to get into the sector.

Hundreds of UCL alumni spanning a wide range of professions have volunteered to become informal mentors to students and graduates considering their career options.

The OECD report also suggests that the skills and attributes developed in higher education can help individuals to “make informed and competent decisions by providing information, improving cognitive skills and strengthening socio-emotional capabilities, such as conscientiousness, self-efficacy and social skills.” While Russell Group universities are not alone in conferring these kinds of benefits, we have a real commitment to helping our students to develop as individuals; it is as much of a priority to us as academic excellence and career preparation.

Giving something back

Increasing numbers of our graduates want to stay involved with their universities and there is a wide variety of ways in which they can contribute to helping future generations of students. Russell Group universities have successful and growing alumni associations across the UK and internationally which provide excellent opportunities for networking and staying in touch.

Many of our universities make active use of their alumni to mentor current students or to provide work experience opportunities. Alumni also often contribute to other activities such as admissions and marketing. At King's College London, alumni attend a wide range of recruitment events and sometimes assist in interviewing prospective students.

Over the last few years, many universities have launched campaigns to encourage philanthropic giving amongst their alumni and other supporters, with matched funding available via a Government scheme.¹⁸ A survey of donations in 2011–12 shows that 120,443 Russell Group alumni¹⁹ have made voluntary donations – a much higher number than in other parts of the sector.

Alumni associations at Russell Group universities provide lots of opportunities for informal networking and getting back in touch. Local branches and associations exist across the UK and in many other countries; universities are always keen to support those wanting to set up local branches or to organise events.

Conclusion: The Russell Group university student experience gives our graduates a head start in the global labour market

Graduation is not the end. A student's relationship with a Russell Group university can last a lifetime, as the growing number of alumni staying in contact with their universities and giving back through fundraising and mentoring shows. In fact, this close link between former students and their universities is perhaps one of the strongest indicators of a positive experience during their time as a student. This experience is one which encourages students at all levels to develop the in-depth subject knowledge, graduate attributes and high-level employability skills which enable them to excel in some of the most demanding graduate jobs in the UK and around the world. Russell Group graduates are well placed to make their mark on the global stage, and to lead responsible, rewarding lives. ■

The Russell Group graduate in the world

- Russell Group students have excellent opportunities to achieve academic success, putting them in the best position to go into rewarding careers or further, advanced study.
- Russell Group graduates have a significant financial and career satisfaction advantage, and graduates generally are more likely to lead healthier, happier lives and engage in civic activity for the benefit of society.
- The benefits of a Russell Group university education are recognised by employers around the world, who specifically target our graduates in their recruitment activities.



“Graduate recruiters and developers highly value the breadth of intellect and skills that many Russell Group graduates can bring to their organisations.”

Stephen Isherwood, Chief Executive,
Association of Graduate Recruiters

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32. This data is from the International Student Barometer, a large-scale survey of international students carried out by the International Graduate Insight Group (i-graduate). It provides data on the key priorities for international students and levels of satisfaction in these key areas. Responses were considered from undergraduate students only, at Russell Group universities and 13 other leading international universities. These 13 institutions were chosen on the basis of institutions included in the International Student Barometer survey that have also appeared within the top 100 institutions in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings.

33. Data supplied by i-graduate.

34. Results for the 24 current members of the Russell Group of Universities

Section 3

1. HEPI, *Postgraduate education in the UK, 2010*, available at: www.hepi.ac.uk/files/14PostgraduateEducation-FullReport.pdf.

2. DLHE data, 2011–12 (calculation by the Russell Group).

3. DLHE data, 2006–07. Available at: www.hesa.ac.uk/component/option,com_pubs/Itemid,286/task,show_year/pubId,1714/versionId,54/yearId,262/.

4. Ibid.

5. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, *The impact of university degrees on the lifecycle of earnings: some further analysis, 2013*

6. DLHE Longitudinal Table, 2006–07, published 2011 (calculation by the Russell Group).

7. According to HESA data for 2011–12, 20% of Russell Group graduates achieve first class honours (compared to a sector average of 16%) and a further 52% achieve 2:1 degrees (against a sector average of 46%) (calculation by the Russell Group).

8. HEFCE Rates of qualification from postgraduate research degrees: Projected study outcomes of full-time students starting postgraduate research degrees in 2008–09 and 2009–10. www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2012/201210/ (calculation by the Russell Group).

9. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, *The impact of university degrees on the lifecycle of earnings: some further analysis, 2013*.

10. Research by the Sutton Trust into the legal and journalism professions has shown that the majority of barristers, judges and partners in the City's five 'magic circle' law firms attended a leading university, as did the majority of leading journalists. In addition, nearly half of MPs and over half of peers attended a leading university. (Source: Sutton Trust Briefing Note: *The Educational Backgrounds of the UK's Top Solicitors, Barristers and Judges, 2005*; The Sutton Trust, *The Educational Backgrounds of Members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, 2005*; The Sutton Trust, *The Educational Backgrounds of Leading Journalists, 2006*.)

11. Available at: www.careers.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Summary-of-the-Oxford-University-Alumni-Careers-Survey-v2.pdf.

12. Oxford has also created an online tool for comparing data about its graduates' careers and salaries. Comparative information on alumni from 2009–12 is available across a range of variables including level of study, gender, subject area, individual course and college. www.careers.ox.ac.uk/academics/tracking-students-careers-activity/

13. High Fliers, *The Graduate Market in 2013*, available at: www.highfliers.co.uk/download/GMReport13.pdf.

14. QS, *World university rankings, 2012* (available at: www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2012).

15. High Fliers, *The Graduate Market in 2013*, www.highfliers.co.uk/download/GMReport13.pdf

16. CBI/Pearson, *Learning to grow: what employers need from education and skills, 2012*, available at: www.cbi.org.uk/media/1514978/cbi_education_and_skills_survey_2012.pdf.

17. OECD, *Education at a Glance: OECD indicators, 2011* (available at: www.oecd.org/dataoecd/61/2/48631582.pdf).

18. Matched funding was made available to English and Welsh higher education providers from 2008–09 to 2010–11 under the UK Government's Matched Funding Scheme

19. Ross-CASE survey 2011–12, *April 2013*, available at: www.rosscasesurvey.org.uk/. In 2011–12, the Russell Group secured 83% of new funds donated to the higher education sector

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