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Submission from The Russell Group of Universities¹: Innovation, Universities, Skills and Science Select Committee Inquiry into Students and Universities²

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¹ Russell Group member institutions are: University of Birmingham, University of Bristol, University of Cambridge, Cardiff University, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Imperial College London, King’s College London, University of Leeds, University of Liverpool, London School of Economics and Political Science, University of Manchester, Newcastle University, University of Nottingham, Queen’s University Belfast, University of Oxford, University of Sheffield, University of Southampton, University College London and University of Warwick

² The Committee’s inquiry asks for information about higher education across the UK, and this submission responds on that basis. However, it should be noted that some aspects of higher education differ between countries within the UK, and are affected by policies of devolved administrations as well as UK government.

SUMMARY

SUSTAINING THE SUCCESS OF WORLD-CLASS UNIVERSITIES

Sustaining success

- Russell Group universities continue to perform well against their major global competitors. This success is **good news for the UK**, as major research-intensive universities are vital to promoting **economic prosperity** and improving quality of life in this country. UK higher education makes a significant contribution to the UK economy of around £45 billion¹ (more than the pharmaceutical or aircraft industries) and is becoming increasingly important in the UK's knowledge economy.
- Russell Group universities are, however, very concerned about their ability to sustain this level of success in the face of **fierce global competition**. There is evidence of the growing strength of our major competitors – particularly, but not only, US institutions - who benefit from much higher levels of investment than UK universities.

Funding: autonomy, concentration and access to additional funding

- Universities play a major role in supporting the UK knowledge economy, and their importance is thrown into even sharper relief during an economic downturn. University research generates new knowledge and ideas, underpinning the capacity of business to innovate and adapt in a turbulent economic climate.
- It is crucial that we **continue to invest sustainably** in our leading research-intensive universities: they need to be able to continue to perform excellent research, invest in facilities, attract and train the best students and researchers and compete on the global stage for the social and economic benefit of the UK.
- The UK benefits from having a diverse higher education system and this diversity in mission should be encouraged. Not all universities can or should conduct world class research but they make a key contribution to the community in other important ways which should be fully recognised.

- However, recent research into higher education in Europe has shown the importance of supporting our world-class universities if Europe is to be at the **forefront of innovation and knowledge**. The UK's successful international performance on higher education and research, relative to the rest of Europe, owes much to our track record in **supporting our top-performing universities**.

Concentration in research funding

- Research funding must support excellence in research wherever it is found. This key principle has **driven the success of UK research** and will continue to be key to the UK's success in the future – enabling world-class research to flourish and supporting the UK's leading research base.
- The current concentration of research funding, based on excellence, is broadly at the right level to sustain the breadth and depth of the UK's research strengths and identify and support pockets of research excellence across the sector.
- World-class research has a highly significant **impact on economic prosperity** and social well-being generating significant financial returns; leading to successful partnerships with industry; and supporting international research collaboration.
- The dual support system plays an essential part in sustaining research of the highest **quality** and facilitates the health of the UK's research base:
 - Dual support provides a dynamic funding system which combines stable core funding with competitively awarded grants.
 - Dual support ensures the **diversity and breadth** of research in the UK.

Autonomy

- International comparisons of universities have shown that the most successful universities are those that are allowed to operate as **autonomous** institutions – particularly those with autonomy over their budgets.
- With regard to public funding, HEFCE funding for research (QR funding, based on quality) and teaching (T funding, the block grant) provides a stable, core funding base **for institutions to manage and invest autonomously**. This type of public funding is essential because it underpins a university's ability to undertake world-class research and teaching.

Access to increased investment

- While this Government has increased investment in major areas of science, innovation and research, maintained the unit of funding and introduced variable fees, the two major areas of academic activity, namely teaching and research, are still **significantly underfunded**, particularly in comparison to our main international competitors.
- In the current economic climate there is likely to be increased pressure on public spending on higher education and research including Research Council budgets and QR spending. There are also signs that R&D investment from business will be affected and charities' funding for research may be reduced. This is all at a time when university costs are increasing (people, energy, the cost of borrowing).
- Without **access to increased investment** there is a real danger that the UK's success will not be sustained.

ADMISSIONS AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION

- It is essential to analyse the **root causes** of the low proportion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds at university to understand how the problem can be solved.
- There is a robust body of evidence which demonstrates that academic attainment at school before the age of 18 is the most important factor in whether a student will go on to higher education, regardless of socio-economic background.
- Compelling evidence demonstrates that the problem of **educational inequality begins at a very young age** – even while the child is in the womb. The socio-economic gap actually widens as children progress through school and by GCSE and A Level stage, the gap becomes a gulf with students from higher socio-economic backgrounds significantly more likely to do well.
- Moreover, the increase in the number of students receiving 3+ A grades at A-level has come disproportionately from independent schools.
- These problems are compounded by the fact that going to independent and grammar schools confers further benefits, such as the greater likelihood of taking A-level subjects, or equivalent, in key subjects such as sciences, maths and modern languages – often required as necessary preparation for a range of STEM courses at Russell Group universities.

- Moreover, many pupils, particularly those from lower social backgrounds, do not receive adequate advice and guidance at school about higher education nor encouragement to consider applying to Russell Group universities. It is important that young people are given accurate information about the benefits of choosing the best course and institution for them when making choices which will affect their life chances.
- **Under-achievement at school caused by complex socio-economic factors is the real root of the problem.** Clearly, only governments can attempt to tackle these issues, but Russell group universities recognise they have a key role to play in working assiduously with schools, charities and businesses as well as the government to give everyone a fair chance of fulfilling their potential.
- Our institutions are constantly seeking to develop the most effective ways of identifying real potential. It is in all our interests to ensure we are giving the brightest candidates from all backgrounds the opportunity to flourish on our courses and to go to the best university for them.
- We have developed a range of 'special entry routes' for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, the University of Warwick gives students the opportunity to study for their first years at the local further education college and then transfer to the university. Leeds and King's allow students from deprived backgrounds who show great potential but who may have just missed the grade to do an extra year to 'catch-up' with the other students.
- Russell Group universities also undertake a raft of initiatives to **raise attainment and aspirations** through links with local schools and colleges. Often Russell Group universities do not directly benefit from the widening participation activities they undertake as many pupils who receive this help apply to other institutions. But we recognise our role in inspiring and helping all students to fulfil their potential.

Admissions

- Our universities are committed to operating **fair and transparent** admissions processes.
- Our universities make great efforts to provide information for applicants and publicise their admissions policies: on their websites; through UCAS entry profiles; in prospectuses; and, in some cases, through podcasts and videos online. It is particularly important that pupils from families who haven't been to university, or who have less knowledge about higher education than others, are given robust support and guidance on the application process.

- A-level qualifications (or their equivalent) are a key source of information about academic ability but we do not just rely on exam grades. Russell Group universities take a range of factors and information into account ('contextual information') to ensure that we can identify the candidates with the most **potential to excel** on our courses - whatever their social or educational background.
- The vast majority of Russell Group universities, for example, use personal statements and references when assessing candidates. Some departments also interview candidates or ask them to sit additional tests particularly for the most competitive courses to give the applicant a further opportunity to demonstrate their strengths or a real interest in the subject. Others take into account any particular barriers the candidate may have faced during his/her education such as spending time in care. The candidate's academic success is therefore considered in a **broader context**.

Performance Indicators

- We consider the performance indicator benchmarks to be unhelpful and inaccurate for a variety of reasons. Three key factors which account for the relatively low proportion of students from 'non-traditional backgrounds' at Russell Group universities are not factored into these figures. Our concerns with the calculation are detailed within this document.

THE BALANCE BETWEEN TEACHING AND RESEARCH

- The combination of teaching and research excellence in Russell Group universities offers students a world-class student experience.
- Now more than ever, employers want graduates who are entrepreneurial, good at problem-solving, able to handle uncertainty and who can work both independently and within a team. Russell Group universities create the optimum environment for students to develop these crucial skills by providing:
 - opportunities to engage in research processes and undertake independent projects;
 - access to leading thinkers, world-class experts in their fields as well as cutting-edge researchers;
 - high-quality libraries and facilities and a curriculum informed by world-class research;
 - interaction with a highly motivated and talented peer group
- Different learners require different levels of input and teaching approaches. Russell Group universities admit high-achieving, well-prepared, self-motivated students and we encourage them to work effectively and efficiently through directed self-learning. There is considerable evidence to demonstrate the benefits this delivers to students as well as the **value to employers**.

- There is a significant body of research which points to the benefits of learning in a research-intensive environment, such as those provided by Russell Group universities, which suggests that research-led learning offers significant benefits to students' education and personal and professional development. Independent learning through research, in a world-class research environment, remains at the heart of the Russell Group student experience.

STUDENT SUPPORT AND ENGAGEMENT

Student support

- There is a robust body of evidence which demonstrates that **academic attainment** before the age of 18, **not financial considerations**, is the most important factor in whether a student will go on to higher education. When A-level grades are taken into account, students from deprived and wealthy backgrounds are equally likely to go to university. So it is not surprising that under the new system of fees, loans and grants, applications to English universities have continued to increase from students of all social backgrounds.
- However, we are concerned about evidence which suggests that some students may be put off applying to a Russell Group university as a result of false preconceptions, misinformation, lack of confidence or misunderstandings about the costs and financial support available. Russell Group universities want to ensure all students have the financial help they need and to try to overcome some of these barriers by offering very generous bursaries.
- Since the introduction of the fees regime, all our institutions have greatly increased the amount of financial support given to students from low income families through bursaries. OFFA data attests to the enormous efforts Russell Group universities have made to help less well-off students: on average across The Russell Group, students from the lowest income backgrounds received guaranteed bursarial support of £1,680 in 2006-07 (based on OFFA figures). This is **almost six times the minimum bursary** of £300 required by OFFA. In some institutions, guaranteed support is as much as £4,000 in the first year of study and £3,000 thereafter.
- Another means of addressing the problem of preconceptions is **improving information, advice and guidance**:
 - The vast majority of students recognise that attending a Russell Group university is a worthwhile investment in their future. The benefits of attending such a university are considerable. Demand for Russell Group graduates remains high and there is a significant earnings premium gained from attending a Russell Group university.

- Russell Group universities are working hard to improve the provision of accurate and timely information and guidance to young people about the costs, benefits, and financial support available to students.

The Russell Group student experience

- The research-led learning environment in Russell Group universities creates an **ideal environment for students** to develop their full potential, acquire skills that are essential for success in the labour market and achieve maximum value for money.
- Now more than ever, employers want graduates who are entrepreneurial, good at problem-solving, able to handle uncertainty and who can work both independently and within a team. Russell Group universities create the optimum environment for students to develop these crucial skills that are highly **valued by employers**.
- Russell Group universities admit high-achieving students but we encourage them to work effectively and efficiently through directed self-learning. The benefits to students are clear: Russell Group universities have high levels of **student satisfaction**, the highest starting salaries and rates of return and the lowest average non-completion rates in the higher education sector.

Engaging students

- Russell Group universities are fully involved in national and local approaches to engage students as effectively as possible. Some examples are given in the main document. The year-on-year increase in student satisfaction at Russell Group universities highlights the value of our institutions' increasing efforts to **put students at the heart of the university experience**.

SECTION 1: ADMISSIONS & WIDENING PARTICIPATION

Root causes of educational disadvantage

- Compelling evidence demonstrates how **early the problem of educational inequality begins.**³ At 22 months, the link between socio-economic background and educational attainment is evident. By the age of six, middle-class children who had low scores in cognitive tests at 22 months have completely overtaken the few poorer children who had done well in those tests.
- The socio-economic gap actually widens as children progress through school and by GCSE, the gap becomes a gulf. Attainment of 5+ good (A*-C) GCSEs varies by over 40 percentage points between the top and bottom socio-economic backgrounds (77% compared to 31% in 2002), so that children with professional parents are well over twice as likely to gain five or more good GCSEs than children with parents in routine occupations. Young people whose parents have degree qualifications are also disproportionately more likely to study post-16 at A-level – 61% of pupils with at least one parent with a degree level qualification as opposed to 27% where neither parent has A-level qualifications.⁴
- Complex socio-economic factors drive this divergence in life chances from a very early age. For examples, middle-class children in general benefit from households with more resources, a nourishing linguistic and intellectually stimulating, stable environment. Not only are they much better equipped to flourish at school but they tend to congregate in the same high-performing schools which in turn fosters a pro-learning, high aspiration culture. The expectations of families, teachers, peer groups and role-models can have a profound effect on the aspirations and attainment of young people.
- These problems are compounded by the fact that pupils who go to independent and grammar schools are far more likely to take key subjects such as sciences, maths and modern languages. Pupils at independent schools are roughly three times more likely to be doing further maths and 2.5 times more likely to be doing a language A-level than those at comprehensive schools. Only 1 in 10 students in specialist science and mainstream schools takes at least one single science at A-level, compared to 1 in 3 at grammar and independent schools.
- The number of students receiving 3+ A grades at A-level is increasing and the students achieving the top grades are studying disproportionately at independent schools. Last year, nearly 30,000 students received 3 A grades at A-level and 16,000 received 4As. While only 20% of A-level students come from independent and grammar schools, they account for over half of those gaining 3As. Only 7% of candidates in comprehensive schools gain 3As compared to 29% in independent schools and 23% in grammar schools.

³ Feinstein, L (1999) *Pre-school Educational Inequality? British children in the 1970 cohort*. London: Center for Economic Performance.

⁴ DfES (2002). Youth Cohort Study: The Activities and Experiences of 16 Year Olds in England and Wales: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000382/V5sfr04-2003.pdf>

- This divergence in levels of attainment is accelerating instead of diminishing. The independent sector saw a 9.1 percentage point increase in the number of A grades at A-level between 2002 and 2008 - from 41.3 per cent to 50.4 per cent. Over the same period, top grades in comprehensives increased by only 3.9 points to 20.4 per cent.⁵
- Moreover, independent school pupils are also much more likely to apply to Russell Group universities. 50.3% of students from independent schools apply to Russell Group universities while only 29.7% from maintained schools do so. Quite simply, we cannot consider those students that do not apply.
- Clearly only governments can attempt to tackle these issues but Russell Group universities recognise that they can play an important role in working with schools, charities and businesses as well as government to give everyone a fair chance of fulfilling their potential.

Widening participation

- Effective information, advice and guidance about the benefits of higher education and attending research-intensive institutions is essential to ensure that young people have the information they require to make decisions that will maximise their life chances. Many pupils, particularly those from lower social backgrounds, do not receive adequate **information, advice and guidance** at school about higher education. We are alarmed by increasing evidence that some teachers may not be encouraging some of their students to consider Russell Group universities.⁶ It is particularly important that pupils from families who haven't been to university, or who have less knowledge about higher education than others are given robust support and guidance at school.⁷
- Often Russell Group universities do not directly benefit from the widening participation activities they undertake because many pupils who receive this help apply to other institutions. However, we recognise our role in helping to **raise attainment and aspirations** - helping all students to fulfil their potential and inspiring them to consider higher education.
- Our institutions are constantly seeking to develop the most effective ways of identifying real potential. It is in all our interests to ensure we are giving the brightest candidates from all backgrounds the opportunity to flourish on our courses and to go to the best university for them.
- We have also developed a range of '**special entry routes**' for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, the University of Warwick gives students the opportunity to study for their first years at the local further education college and then transfer to the university. Leeds and King's allow students who

⁵ JCQ (2008): 14 August 2008 press conference.

⁶ The Sutton Trust and Institute of Education (2008). "Primed for Success": <http://www.suttontrust.com/reports/PrimedforSuccess.pdf>

⁷ McKenzie, H. (2005). "The Tuition Trap". Toronto: Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations. September 2005.

show great potential but who may have just missed the grade to do an extra year to 'catch-up' with the other students. (More information on special entry routes to Russell Group universities is available in Appendix A)

Admissions

- The issue of widening participation must be separated from that of fair access. Widening participation refers to increasing the number of students from lower socio-economic groups who can benefit from higher education. Wider participation in higher education will be achieved primarily by **raising the levels of attainment of pupils from low income backgrounds** at school.
- Fair access to any university means ensuring that all candidates competing for a place on a chosen course are assessed as fairly and as accurately as possible. Often this is a greater concern for selective courses and institutions, where staff members involved in admissions must choose between many highly-qualified applicants in a fair and transparent way. However, our institutions are constantly seeking to refine the information we draw on to help us identify potential and aptitude.
- A-level qualifications (or their equivalent) are a key source of information about academic ability but **we do not just rely on exam grades**. Russell Group universities take a range of factors and information into account ('contextual information') to ensure that we can identify the candidates with the most **potential to excel** on our courses - whatever their social or educational background. The vast majority of Russell Group universities, for example, use personal statements and references when assessing candidates. Some departments also interview candidates or ask them to sit additional tests particularly for the most competitive courses to give applicants a further opportunity to demonstrate their strengths or a real interest in the subject. Others take into account any particular barriers the candidate may have faced during his/her education such as spending time in care. The candidate's academic success is therefore considered in a **broader context**.
- It is crucial that pupils are given accurate **information, advice and guidance** when making choices about their A-level subjects. It is particularly important that pupils from families who haven't been to university, or who have less knowledge about higher education than others are given robust support and guidance at school.
- Russell Group universities are increasing and improving the information they provide for potential students about the qualifications and skills they need to be successful in pursuing their chosen course. They now offer clear recommendations on the *package* of A-levels (or equivalent) which would give a candidate the best grounding for a particular course and those which would be a less ideal *combination* of A-levels.
- Our universities make great efforts to **publicise their admissions policies**: on their websites; through UCAS entry profiles; in prospectuses; and, in some cases, through podcasts and videos online.

Question 1: The effectiveness of the process for admission to Higher Education Institutions, including A-levels, Advanced Diplomas, apprenticeships and other university entrance tests

Key facts: admissions and school qualifications

- Participation in higher education varies little by social class once prior attainment is factored in. When broken down **by A-level scores, the percentage of students that enter HE across different social classes is almost identical.**
- A record number of pupils are achieving 3 A grades at A-level. Nearly 30,000 students received 3 A grades at A-level last year and 16,000 received 4As.
- Students gaining 3 A grades come **disproportionately from independent and grammar schools.** 20% of A-level students come from independent and grammar schools but they account for over half of those gaining 3As.
- The increase in the number of A grades awarded is coming from independent and grammar schools. The independent sector saw a 9.1 percentage point increase in the number of A grades at A-level between 2002 and 2008 - from 41.3 per cent to 50.4 per cent. Over the same period, top grades in comprehensives increased by only 3.9 points to 20.4 per cent⁸.
- In addition, independent and grammar school students are far more likely to take **key subjects** such as sciences, maths and modern languages.
- Independent school pupils are also much **more likely to apply** to Russell Group universities. 50.3% of independent school applicants apply to Russell Group universities while only 29.7% from maintained schools do so.

1. For reasons outlined above in the summary, A-level qualifications (or equivalent) remain the key source of information about academic ability, but it is difficult for admissions tutors to choose between excellent candidates. Due regard should be given to the different school qualifications that exist between the different nations of the UK. For the purposes of this response, however, we will focus on A-level qualifications.
2. **Annex A** contains further information and analysis of trends in A-level attainment by school type and subject and examines **STEM A-level results** in particular across the **private and state sector**.
3. **Annex B** describes some best practice examples of the **special entry routes** for non-traditional students applying to Russell Group universities.

⁸ JCQ (2008): 14 August 2008 press conference.

4. A range of additional briefings are available on access courses, school and college links, programmes aimed at particular under-represented groups and more. Please contact Anthony Dursi (anthony.dursi@russellgroup.ac.uk) at The Russell Group for more information.
5. Russell Group universities are constantly examining the most effective ways of ensuring that we identify the candidates with the **potential** to flourish on our courses and to give them real opportunities to demonstrate that talent and potential.
6. For further details, please see the summary on admissions at the beginning of Section 1.

Question 2: *The UK's ability to meet government targets for Higher Education participation and the relevance of these targets*

Key facts: Russell Group widening participation performance indicators

- Roughly **three quarters of young, full-time first degree entrants to Russell Group universities are from state schools or colleges**. This year's widening participation performance indicators found that Russell Group universities on average have increased their percentage of entrants from state-schools twice as much as the sector.
- Since the inception of performance indicators, Russell Group universities have continued to improve against their benchmarks in terms of intake from lower participation neighbourhoods

Widening participation indicators

7. The widening participation performance indicators only provide a very broad measure of participation by under-represented groups in higher education. **They are not targets**, nor were they intended to be, as they are not sufficiently accurate or robust.
8. HEFCE's first report on these indicators notes: "the success of an institution's access policies **cannot be gauged by looking at the 'access' indicators alone** ... Institutions need to be able to identify entrants with the potential to benefit from higher education"⁹.
9. HEFCE's '*Guide to Widening Participation*' further states that, "it is hard to meaningfully compare two institutions that are very different. For example, an institution where most students enter with very good A-level qualifications should not usually be compared with one whose students come from a wider range of

⁹ http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/1999/99_11.doc

educational backgrounds. [...] If two institutions have very different benchmarks, this is an indication that they are so different that comparing them would not give a helpful answer".¹⁰

10. Three key factors which account for the relatively low proportion of students from 'non-traditional backgrounds' at Russell Group universities **are not factored into the benchmark figures** provided annually by HESA:
 - The use of **UCAS tariff points** in the performance indicators inflates the potential number of qualified applicants, as many of these pupils may not have the **qualifications** required to enter their chosen course or university. The UCAS tariff includes points for a broad range of achievements including Higher Sports Leader Award, passing British Horse Society certificates and various music examinations. These types of activities or awards would not always be taken into account in the admissions process at our universities.
 - The benchmarks do not take into account whether students have the necessary **subject combination** for particular areas of study, which is particularly important in STEM-based subjects. Numeracy, for example, is essential for many undergraduate courses at our universities, particularly in engineering, economics and medicine. Again, this has the effect of making it appear that more students have the necessary knowledge and skills to enter a particular course than is the case.
 - The number of **applications** from 'non-traditional' pupils is not taken into account. Lack of applications from such groups is one of the main difficulties Russell Group universities face in widening participation. Quite simply, Russell Group universities cannot consider applicants who do not apply.

¹⁰ <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/PerfInd/2001/guide.htm>

Question 3: The implementation and success of widening participation initiatives, and the impact of the current funding regime on these objectives

Key facts: widening participation at Russell Group universities

- Russell Group universities currently employ well over 100 (full-time equivalent) widening participation staff.
- Funding devoted by Russell Group universities to outreach programmes has grown by nearly £5m since 2006 – a commitment of over £100,000 more per institution than the sector average.
- The Russell Group has over 110,000 part-time students and more part-time students on average than the sector as a whole. We have developed a huge array of initiatives to build on the success of our part-time study programmes.
- There are a variety of distance learning opportunities available from Russell Group universities. These include LSE's distance learning 'foundation year' and the University of Cambridge's e-learning environment in the Institute of Continuing Education, which was particularly designed for part-time study.

11. An evaluation of *King's College London's Extended Medical Degree Programme* found that students who were accepted with lower offers into the programme **did as well or better** than their peers on the conventional course. The evaluation was carried out in 2008, six years after the programme began, and after its first cohort had progressed through their full degree. This additional year, often referred to as a 'foundation year', is an extra year at the start of a degree that prepares students without the standard required qualifications or attainment to then enter their chosen course. These year-long courses are designed to help students 'catch-up' with their peers who have entered through a conventional route. They are extremely rigorous in order to ensure that students will have the necessary skills, experience and knowledge to succeed in their degree. They are specifically designed to provide additional support and tuition to students in their **transition to higher education**.
- The evaluation notes, "we can safely conclude that medical students can succeed without AAB at A level if these results were obtained from a low achieving school".¹¹
 - These students now make up over 10% of the medical student population at King's College London and the best of them are consistently **in the top 15% of their whole year group in examination results**.
 - Retention rates for these students are high at 90%. While this is lower than their peers who entered through the traditional route (97%), it is well above the UK average (83%).

¹¹ Garlick, P and G Brown (2008). "Widening participation in medicine". *British Medical Journal*: 336;1111-1113:

12. An evaluation of the *Access to Leeds* programme found similarly high levels of attainment and retention for those 'non-traditional students' entering through the alternative route.
 - While numbers remain modest, the evaluation shows that over 70% of those students are getting firsts or 2:1s every year, even though they have entered with lower A-level grades. This compares well with those students who enter through traditional routes.
 - While retention rates have been slightly lower for two years of the programme, in one year the retention rates surpassed the university average.

13. Evaluations of Access 2 Birmingham (A2B) and the Manchester Access Programme have shown that these programmes are effective as supported entry routes into the universities.
 - Of the 139 participants on the *Manchester Access Programme* in the 2007 cohort, 108 (78%) applied to the University and 92 (85%) received an offer from the University. The University of Manchester is committed to expanding the programme and will provide up to 300 new places on the programme next year.
 - Applications to A2B have grown from 356 in 2005-06 to 585 in 2007-08. Offers to the University have increased from 213 to 388 (82%) in the same period. This increased conversion is attributable to ongoing support provided through the programme to help participants transition from school to university study.

14. *Pathways to the Professions* was established at the University of Edinburgh in 2001-02 to encourage progression by under-represented school students into professional courses in medicine, veterinary medicine and law, and subsequently into the professions themselves. Working with university colleges and schools, professional bodies, state schools and families, the programme was initiated and developed across all 46 state schools in Edinburgh and the Lothians and has over 600 school students registered. A recent evaluation found:
 - Registrations by school students have increased year on year
 - An increase in applications to degree courses from the 46 schools:
 - 136% increase in applications to medicine
 - 166% increase in applications to veterinary medicine since it has been involved in the project
 - 38% increase in applications for law
 - *Pathways to Law* has been extended to five other Russell Group universities, including the University of Leeds, the London School of Economics & Political Science, University of Manchester, University of Southampton and University of Warwick.

15. However, these **programmes are costly and therefore limited in size and scope**. The King's College London programme, for example, costs approximately £190,000 a year for academic staff alone, for an intake of fifty students.

Question 4: The role of the Government in developing and promoting fair access and admissions policies for the UK Higher Education sector

16. This question demands more space than is available through this consultation.
17. **Inequality in life chances and educational success** is the key factor in the lower proportion of students from low income backgrounds at university. This inequality is driven by complex and entrenched socio-economic factors which only governments can begin to address. But our universities are committed to helping the Government to tackle these problems as far as possible.
18. We welcome the Government's acknowledgement that admissions is the responsibility of autonomous higher education institutions.
- Rt. Hon. John Denham MP, Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills recently stated, "Universities are autonomous institutions responsible for their admissions policies."¹²
 - On the subject of entry requirements, Rt. Hon. David Lammy MP, Minister for Higher Education, has noted "these are for each university to decide on the basis of the academic and professional needs of each course."¹³
19. Russell Group universities acknowledge the need for admissions policies to be **open and transparent**. In April, The Russell Group welcomed the speech by the Secretary of State of Innovation, Universities and Skills outlining the need to include information about widening participation in OFFA agreements. Russell Group universities are happy to continue to provide information about our admissions policies.
20. The government's initial guidance letter on the creation of OFFA states: "the law puts the contents of particular courses and the manner in which they are taught, as well as institutions' admissions policies and procedures, outside your remit". QAA's Code of Practice on Admissions, Section 10 sets out the expectation for higher education institutions to have fair, accessible and transparent admissions policies and procedures.

¹² <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/education/article5258339.ece>

¹³ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm081104/text/81104w0043.htm>

SECTION 2: THE BALANCE BETWEEN TEACHING AND RESEARCH

Research-led learning

21. The combination of **teaching and research excellence** in Russell Group universities creates an ideal learning environment. Now more than ever, employers want graduates who are entrepreneurial, good at problem-solving, able to handle uncertainty and who can work both independently and within a team. Russell Group universities create the optimum environment for students to develop these crucial skills by providing:
 - opportunities to engage in research processes and undertake independent projects;
 - access to leading thinkers, world-class experts in their fields as well as cutting-edge researchers;
 - high-quality libraries and facilities and a curriculum informed by world-class research;
 - highly motivated and talented peer group to interact with.
22. Russell Group universities offer world-class teaching in an environment that instils independence of thought and learning. It is a model that ensures we continue to produce capable, self-motivated graduates of the highest standard.
23. We would like to emphasise that any consideration of the balance between teaching and research should recognise the **importance of research-led learning** to the student learning experience.
24. Rather than considering “the balance between teaching and research” as if these are separate entities or processes, The Russell Group believes that it is more accurate to consider how teaching and research interact within the broader context of a research-led learning environment. As institutions which are able to demonstrate excellence in both research and teaching (see **Annex C**), Russell Group universities provide an environment in which students learn through research, adding value to the student experience. We welcome reports by HEFCE¹⁴ and the Research Forum¹⁵ which have pointed to the benefits or added value of learning in a research-intensive environment.
25. Wage premiums are a clear indicator of value in the graduate labour market and demonstrate that Russell Group graduates are highly esteemed by employers because they benefit from some of the **highest returns on their degrees**. Studying at a Russell Group university confers a **wage premium of approximately 10 per cent** compared to modern universities, after accounting for A-level scores, parental background, school attended and other factors affecting

¹⁴ Higher Education Funding Council for England, *Fundamental Review of Research Policy and Funding: Final Report of the sub-group to consider the interaction between teaching, research and other activities of HEIs*, 2000.

¹⁵ Research Forum, “The Relationships Between Research and Teaching in Institutions of Higher Education”, June 2004.

wages.^{16,17} It is likely that the education provided by Russell Group universities, with its emphasis on engaging students as independent, critically-minded learners, is a significant factor in producing **graduates that are highly valued by employers**. As well as achieving higher rates of return, Russell Group graduates continue to meet a crucial high-level skills need in the UK.

26. There is also growing evidence of a specific **demand from employers for graduates with skills in STEM subjects** (science, technology, engineering and maths). The most recent CBI Skills Survey found that 92% of firms want employees with STEM skills. By 2014, it is expected that the UK will need to fill around three-quarters of a million (730,000) extra jobs requiring highly numerate, analytical people with STEM skills, making a net total of 2.4 million of these jobs in six years time.¹⁸ Approximately 30% of STEM graduates in the UK graduate from Russell Group universities. The numeracy and analytical skills acquired from studying STEM subjects, coupled with the wider benefits of research-led learning, makes these graduates highly attractive to employers and key contributors to the economy.
27. Further details on the **benefits of research-led learning** and the **added value** of the Russell Group student learning experience can be found at **Annex D**.
28. Russell Group universities are committed to continuing to develop research-led learning and the academic experience of their students to ensure that the culture of enquiry-based, independent learning in a world-class research environment remains at the heart of the student experience.
29. It can be difficult to define precisely what is meant by research-led learning, particularly given that a 'one size fits all' approach to supporting this type of learning environment is unlikely to be successful. Learning through research exists in a variety of modes appropriate to individual institutions, departments and disciplines¹⁹ and can be supported in a number of ways, including through the content and structure of the curriculum, through teaching practice, and through providing student research opportunities²⁰.

¹⁶ Chevalier, A. and Conlon, C., "Does it pay to attend a prestigious university?", 2003, Centre for the Economics of Education, LSE (table 5 for the 1995 cohort, page 29).

¹⁷ A further study shows that if a student attends an institution in the highest quartile - as determined by a number of different quality measures (RAE scores, retention rates, and tariff scores) - this leads to a higher wage of between 10 and 16 per cent (depending on the measure) compared to an individual who attends an institution in the lowest quartile. Although the report does not identify individual institutions, Russell Group universities achieve high RAE scores, retention rates and tariff scores so it is very likely they are in the top quartile of institutions in the UK. Reference: Hussain, McNally and Telhaj, "University Quality and Graduate Wages in the UK", 2009, Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics.

¹⁸ 'CBI/Edexcel Education & Skills Survey 2008'

¹⁹ The importance of supporting links in ways appropriate to different disciplines is noted in, for example: Brew, A. "Research and teaching: changing relationships in a changing context," *Studies in Higher Education*, 24:3, 291-301, 1999; Robertson, J. and Bond, C., "Experiences of the Relation between Teaching and Research: what do academics think?" in *Higher Education Research and Development*, 20:1, 5-19 (2001).

²⁰ Griffiths, R., "Knowledge production and the research-teaching nexus: the case of the built environment disciplines", *Studies in Higher Education*, 29:5, 709-727, 2004. Griffiths developed a typology drawn from the findings of Oxford Brookes University's LINK project on enhancing teaching-research links in the Built Environment disciplines (now the Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research at Oxford Brookes and Warwick Universities). Jenkins and Healey (*Institutional strategies to link teaching and research*, The Higher Education Academy, 2005) note that these definitions were amended in 2003 by the then Pro Vice-

Question 5: Levels of funding for, and the balance between, teaching and research in UK HEIs; the sustainability of methods of assessing excellence in teaching and research and the impact of research assessment on these activities

Levels of funding for teaching and research

30. It is crucial that we continue to invest in the **sustainability** of our leading research-intensive universities: they need to be able to continue to perform excellent research, invest in facilities, attract and train the best students and researchers and compete on the global stage for the social and economic benefit of the UK.
31. We cannot afford for our leading universities to be under-funded:
- they carry out the world-class research that ensures that the UK is globally competitive and the destination of choice for international investment and collaboration in research;
 - they make a valuable contribution to the economy, society and global citizenship;
 - they conduct high quality teaching in an enquiry-based environment with world class facilities;
 - they make significant investments in research infrastructure;
 - they attract international staff and students, benefiting the UK's society, economy and quality of research.
32. In the current economic climate, investing to support universities will be crucial to ensuring the UK's economic success, both now and in the long-term. University research generates new knowledge and ideas, underpinning the capacity of business to innovate and adapt **in a turbulent economic climate**:
- Through training and developing a highly skilled workforce, universities ensure that UK business can draw on the skills it will need to grow and develop; and universities will meet demand from individuals who look to higher education as a means of improving their chances of entry – or re-entry – into an increasingly competitive job market;
 - As major national and regional industries in their own right, universities draw significant investment to a region through international and domestic students, research funding, and the major programmes of capital investment and infrastructure they support.
33. While this Government has increased investment in major areas of science, innovation and research, maintained the unit of funding and introduced variable fees, teaching and research are still **significantly underfunded**, particularly relative to our main international competitors. In terms of GDP, the US invests over twice as much

as the UK on higher education. Likewise funding for higher education is increasing rapidly in countries such as China, India, Brazil and Australia.

34. The proportion of their income Russell Group universities receive from the public purse has significantly decreased while the revenue derived from **private investment** from business as well as through tuition fees and charitable giving has increased.
35. In the current economic climate there is likely to be increased pressure on public spending on higher education and research including Research Council budgets and QR spending. There are also signs that R&D investment from business will be affected and charities' funding for research - which is a very significant source of income for most Russell Group universities - may be seriously affected. This is all at a time when university costs are increasing (people, energy, the cost of borrowing).
36. Without **access to increased investment** there is a real danger that the UK's success will not be sustained.

The importance of investing in world-class research-intensive universities

37. The role played by world-class research-intensive universities is crucial for the success of UK higher education. It is the UK's reputation for, and commitment to, world-class universities that enables us to be internationally competitive and to attract international investment to the UK. Our leading research-intensive universities are **key to the sustainability of UK higher education** in a global context.
38. The UK is second only to the US in research excellence²¹, and is number one in the G8 of advanced industrial nations for research productivity^{22 23}. With 78% of staff in 5* departments working in Russell Group universities²⁴, it is the leading research-intensive universities that deliver the UK's world-class research.
39. Recent research into higher education in Europe has noted the importance of promoting world-class universities if Europe is to be at the **forefront of innovation and knowledge**, suggesting that whilst it is desirable to maintain a "good average higher education level", it is also vital that world-class universities and peaks of research excellence are fostered. This necessarily means supporting a small number of institutions to be first-rate:

²¹ *International comparative performance of the UK research base*, Evidence Ltd / Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, July 2008.

²² Ibid.

²³ <http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file11959.pdf> 'The scientific impact of Nations', 2004, David King, published in *Nature*

²⁴ Results from the 2001 RAE.

“there is no denying that the high peaks cannot make up a significant proportion of the whole...and Europe needs these peaks.”²⁵

40. The UK’s successful international performance in higher education and research, relative to the rest of Europe, owes much to our track record in **supporting our world-class universities**.²⁶ It is vital that we continue to support those leading universities that secure the UK’s global reputation for high-quality higher education and that drive the UK’s position as an international leader in research.
41. The UK must also respond to increasing international competition, both from established and emerging science nations.²⁷ Many of our major international competitors are making unprecedented investments in their universities, including increasingly **targeting resources towards developing or sustaining leading universities** (realising the benefits of co-locating education and research in universities and the important contribution of universities to top-level research):
 - The **French** government, as well as recently granting autonomy to twenty universities for the first time, has established “Operation Campus” which will target funding to alliances of leading universities forming ‘super-campus’ in an effort to make France’s universities more internationally competitive;
 - **Germany’s** ‘Excellence Initiative’ targets additional funding at clusters of excellence to support leading research and strengthen these higher education institutions;
 - Due to the high levels of targeted central government investment, **China’s** ten historic universities have been increasingly climbing the top 500 international rankings of universities over the past five years, whilst UK universities have remained steady;
 - Data from the National Science Foundation in the **United States** shows that fifty universities (comprising just under 8 per cent of the six hundred and fifty institutions that spent over \$150,000 USD on science and engineering R&D) accounted for 59 per cent of federal research funding in 2006, with the top twenty universities accounting for about a third of funding.²⁸

Research funding – driving excellence

42. Research funding must support excellence in research wherever it is found. This key principle has driven the success of UK research and will continue to be key to the UK’s success in the future – enabling world-class research to flourish and supporting the UK’s leading research base.

²⁵ Aghion, P., Dewatripont, M., Hoxby, C., Mas-Coleil, A., and Sapir, A., *Higher Aspirations: an agenda for reforming European universities* (Bruegel Blueprint Series, Volume V, 2008), p.24.

²⁶ This is noted in Aghion, P. et al, 2008.

²⁷ In addition to continued competition from countries such as the US, Japan and Germany, the UK faces increasing competition from India, China, Korea and other emerging strengths such as South America and the Gulf States.

²⁸ National Science Foundation, *Academic Research and Development Expenditures: Fiscal Year 2006* (2007). NSF data shows that the concentration of research funding in the US has remained relatively stable since 1999, paralleling the trend in research funding in the UK.

- **It is excellent research that has the greatest impact**, generating significant financial returns, as well as broader social and economic benefits; leading to successful partnerships with industry; and supporting international research collaboration.
 - The dual support system plays an essential part in sustaining research of the **highest quality and facilitating the health of the UK's research base**:
 - Dual support provides a dynamic funding system which combines stable core funding with competitively awarded grants.
 - Dual support ensures the diversity and breadth of research in the UK.
43. The Russell Group believes that the current **concentration of research funding is broadly at the right level** to sustain the breadth and depth of the UK's research strengths and identify and support pockets of research excellence across the sector.
44. The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), the results of which determine QR funding, has **driven up the quality of UK research** since its introduction in the 1980s. Research shows that successive RAE cycles have driven improvements not only in the performance of research-intensive institutions but also “at all grades and across subject areas”.²⁹ The graph below illustrates the increase in the UK's share of world citations as the RAE takes effect.³⁰



Question 6: the adequacy of financial support for the development of innovative teaching methods and teaching/research integration

45. It is important that both research and teaching are **funded on a sustainable basis** and in particular that the interactions between research and teaching are recognised. **Investment in one activity can enhance the other** – for example, investment in pedagogical research can lead to improvements in teaching

²⁹ Evidence Ltd, *Impact of selective funding of research in England, and the specific outcomes of HEFCE research funding* (Report to HEFCE and the Department for Education and Skills), 2005.

³⁰ Source: Higher Education Funding Council for England.

methods; improved research facilities can support learning; innovative learning spaces can benefit research activity. It is important that costing of and funding for teaching and research take account of these mutually beneficial relationships.

46. It will be important that HEFCE's proposals to roll the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund into the new Teaching Enhancement and Student Success fund continue to support research-informed teaching and learning in our leading research-intensive universities, which are well-placed to develop pioneering best practice in this area.

Question 7: the quality of teaching provision and learning facilities in UK and the extent to which they vary between HEIs

47. The many indicators of the high level of teaching quality at Russell Group universities – from QAA results to student feedback – are given in Annex C. The 2008 NUS Student Experience Report³¹ showed that Russell Group students indicated the highest levels of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning at their institutions and a much higher proportion – indeed, the vast majority - cited academic reputation as a key factor in their choice of university:
 - **89%** of students at Russell Group universities rated the **quality of teaching and learning as good or excellent**; higher than other pre-1992 universities, post-1992 universities and the sector-wide average.
 - **81%** of Russell Group students cited 'academic reputation' as a main reason for choosing their institution compared to 47% of students across the sector.
48. The NUS Student Experience Report also found that Russell Group students, on average, received more contact hours, undertook more private study hours, and rated the quality of interaction with staff much more highly than the rest of the sector. Russell Group universities also have, on average, the lowest drop-out rates, which is further testament to the quality of teaching and learning students currently receive.
49. The size and success of the research endeavour in Russell Group universities enables them to offer breadth and depth of research expertise (including in educational and pedagogical research³²); an institutional focus on promoting independent learning through research; **world-class research, library and teaching facilities**; and a student experience where teaching and learning are enriched and informed by leading-edge, world-class research.

³¹ NUS Student Experience Report 2008

³² The importance of such research in improving methods of teaching and learning is noted in Gordon et al., *Building capacity for change: research on the scholarship of teaching*, Report to HEFCE, 2003.

Question 8: the availability and adequacy of training in teaching methods for UK academics and the importance of teaching excellence for the academic career path

50. Understanding and **promoting the relationship between teaching and research** will encourage parity of esteem between these related fields. Universities have an important role in affirming the value of teaching and in producing the next generation of university teachers who will inspire our students. All Russell Group universities are continuing to manage and promote the relationship between research, teaching and learning to ensure that teaching and learning are informed and enriched by research across the institution, as evidenced in their strategic plans.³³
51. It is important to provide **high-quality training and support** to maintain high standards among teaching staff, including through **teaching accreditation**. Russell Group universities emphasise training and staff development in their teaching and learning strategies and provide a number of training opportunities, including teaching awards for staff, as well as encouraging the dissemination of best practice through online resources, learning and teaching units and staff networks. Training and staff development are also emphasised in institutional teaching and learning strategies (Further details of Russell Group universities' support for teaching staff development are at **Annex E**)
52. Many Russell Group universities are increasing their investment in university teaching to ensure that **it remains attractive as a career path** – such as the London School of Economics and Political Sciences' recent announcement of an extra £2 million in funding to improve teaching standards and reward good teaching. Ensuring that teaching has parity with research in promotion criteria is an important area of development.

³³ All publicly available Russell Group learning and teaching strategies discuss the ways in which the research-teaching relationship can be supported and strengthened.

SECTION 3: DEGREE CLASSIFICATION

Question 9: *the actions universities, Government and others have taken, or should take, to maintain confidence in the value of degrees awarded by universities in the UK*

53. The world-class reputation of Russell Group universities depends on maintaining **excellence in academic standards and robust methods of quality assurance**. Our universities keep a strict watch on standards, for both home and overseas students, with rigorous checks including the use of independent external examiners and audits from the Quality Assurance Agency. The higher education sector is addressing the need to update the degree awarding system with plans to improve the information on a student's transcript alongside their degree classification. From the Russell Group, the University of Manchester, Newcastle University and University College London are all piloting the Higher Education Achievement Report which was proposed in the Burgess Report on measuring student achievement, published in 2007.
54. There is **no evidence of 'degree inflation'** at the expense of standards at Russell Group universities. Previous research from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has demonstrated a strong correlation between entry qualifications and degree results that continues to exist. The increase in the percentage of Russell Group students gaining firsts and 2:1s from 1994-2002 correlates with a rise in the entrants' qualifications and an increase in standards at the time the Russell Group was established. This continued correlation is acknowledged in the analysis of data in the annex of the Higher Education Policy Institute's (HEPI) 2007 report, "The academic experience of students in English universities". This is not the case across the HE sector. Whilst we do everything to encourage students to excel on their degree course – irrespective of their previous educational success – one would expect a broad correlation between entry qualifications and degree results if standards are consistent over time.
55. We have seen **no evidence** beyond anecdotal, often anonymous, reports that entry standards are being lowered for overseas students. In fact the highest performing students at Russell Group universities are just as likely to be international students as they are UK students. In 2006/07, according to HESA data, 16% of overseas (non-EU) students at Russell Group institutions obtained a first class honours degree, compared to 15% of UK students. This is a clear indication of the high standard of overseas students that achieve a place at our universities and the commitment they have to their studies. Russell Group universities continue to attract the best minds from around the world to study, research and teach in our universities – bringing considerable economic and social benefit to the UK as a whole.

SECTION 4: STUDENT SUPPORT AND ENGAGEMENT

Question 10: *the effectiveness of initiatives to support student engagement in the formulation of HE policy, and how the success or otherwise of these initiatives is being assessed*

56. Russell Group universities are fully involved in national and local approaches to engage students as effectively as possible. Some examples from our institutions include:
- KCL's King's Graduate Project involves both staff and students to develop a flexible framework for learning across the College, including the possibility of an optional core curriculum focusing on independent and enquiry-based learning skills. King's trans-disciplinary and generalist undergraduate degrees incorporate courses in globalisation and diversity and engagement in voluntary work.
 - The University of Leeds' Learning and Teaching Partnership Agreement was written in collaboration with students and staff and sets out what students can expect when studying at Leeds and what the university can expect from them. The Leeds for Life Project also offers support and resources to enable students to make the most of their university experience.
 - The Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research at the University of Warwick is discussing with QAA and others how the concept of the student as producer informs and supports student involvement in the formulation of HE policy. The President of the Students' Union at Warwick is a full member of the governing Council, the Senate and the weekly Steering Committee (University "cabinet").

National Student Survey and NUS Student Experience Report

57. It is important that students have a say in their education to help ensure that the university experience is tailored to their individual needs. The National Student Survey is therefore a useful tool to help our universities continue to target improvements in the quality of education.
58. Providing a first-class teaching and learning experience is vitally important to the Russell Group, so we were delighted to see a positive response to the 2008 National Student Survey. The year-on-year increase in student satisfaction at Russell Group universities helps highlight the value of our institutions' increasing efforts to put students at the heart of the university experience.

In the National Student Survey 2008, **86 % of Russell Group students** agreed with the statement "Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course," an increase from 2007. This compares with an 82% average 'overall' satisfaction rate for all undergraduate students registered at FE and HE institutions.

59. The 2008 NUS Student Experience Report³⁴ showed that Russell Group students indicated the highest levels of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning at their institutions and a much higher proportion – indeed, the vast majority - cited academic reputation as a key factor in their choice of university:
- 89% of students at Russell Group universities rated the quality of teaching and learning as good or excellent; higher than other pre-1992 universities, post-1992 universities and the sector-wide average.
 - 81% of Russell Group students cited ‘academic reputation’ as a main reason for choosing their institution compared to 47% of students across the sector.
60. The NUS Student Experience Report also found that Russell Group students, on average, received more contact hours, undertook more private study hours, and rated the quality of interaction with staff much more highly than the rest of the sector. Russell Group universities also have, on average, the lowest drop-out rates, which is further testament to the quality of teaching and learning students receive.

Question 11: *how the student experience differs in public and private universities*

The Russell Group is not in a position to comment on the development of private institutions. However we believe it is vital that we continue to emphasise the excellent student experience that can be expected from the UK’s leading world-class research intensive universities.

Student Experience

61. The combination of **teaching and research excellence** in Russell Group universities creates an ideal learning environment. Now more than ever, employers want graduates who are entrepreneurial, good at problem-solving, able to handle uncertainty and who can work both independently and within a team. Russell Group universities create the **optimum environment for students** to develop these crucial skills by providing:
- opportunities to engage in research processes and undertake independent projects;
 - access to leading thinkers, world-class experts in their fields as well as cutting-edge researchers
 - high-quality libraries and facilities and a curriculum informed by world-class research;
 - highly motivated and talented peer group to interact with.
62. Different learners require different levels of input and teaching approaches. Russell Group universities admit high-achieving, well-prepared, self-motivated students and we encourage them to work effectively and efficiently through directed self-learning. The benefits to students are clear: we have high rates of student

³⁴ NUS Student Experience Report 2008

satisfaction, the highest starting salaries and rates of return³⁵ and the lowest average non-completion rates in the higher education sector.

63. Russell Group universities offer world class teaching in an environment that instils **independence of thought and learning**. It is a model that ensures we continue to produce capable, self-motivated graduates of the highest standard.

Contact Hours

64. Contact hours will obviously vary according to the subject studied. Different disciplines have developed ways of teaching which are best suited to the subject material, the skills and knowledge of generations of students and the requirements of employers and the labour market. Some subjects like science and engineering rely on structured learning and practical, laboratory-based teaching and require more contact hours. Indeed Russell Group institutions are providing significantly more contact hours than the sector average in these subjects. Students of other subjects such as arts and humanities courses require fewer contact hours in order to develop the skills of independent inquiry, original and creative thinking and rigorous analysis.

Mean scheduled hours of teaching by institution type³⁶

	All Institutions	Russell Group
Medicine and dentistry	21.3	21.3
Subjects allied to medicine	18.8	19.3
Biological Sciences	14.8	16.3
Veterinary agriculture and related	22.2	26.4
Physical Sciences	17.2	18.9
Mathematical & Computer Sciences	15.9	17.1
Engineering & technology	19.3	20.4

65. The 2007 HEPI report, “The academic experience of students in English universities” found that the average amount of teaching received by those studying at Russell Group universities was higher than the sector average (weighted data shows a Russell Group average of 14.4 compared to a sector wide average of 14.2). In addition, students in Russell Group universities spent more time on average on their studies than those at other universities (26.7 hours of study per

³⁵ 2008 CEP research shows that if a student attends an institution in the highest quartile - as determined by a number of different quality measures (RAE scores, retention rates, and tariff scores) – this leads to a higher wage of between 10 and 16 per cent (depending on the measure) compared to an individual who attends an institution in the lowest quartile. Although the report does not identify individual institutions, Russell Group universities achieve high RAE score, retention rates and tariff scores so it is very likely they are in the top quartile of institutions in the UK. “University Quality and Graduate Wages in the UK” Hussain, McNally and Telhaj, Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics, 2008.

³⁶ 2007 HEPI “The academic experience of students in English universities”

week compared to 26 hour average...though variation within institutional group is greater than variation between groups)

66. However, the diversity of the learning experience offered to students at Russell Group universities is not easily measured through contact teaching hours alone. The UK rightly operates an outcome-based model of higher education where qualifications are awarded based on achieving a certain standard or level of achievement. In such a system, measuring the number of hours studied - a measure of input not output - is not a particularly effective indicator of the health of the UK higher education system. As the 2007 HEPI report accepts, there is no necessary connection between these two measurements.

Postgraduate Student Experience

67. Russell Group universities are the major providers of postgraduate education: representing 11% of the UK higher education sector, we produce 56% of all doctorates. Around a third of all students in Russell Group universities are postgraduate students.³⁷
68. Russell Group universities provide a world-class research environment and are committed to enabling their research students to develop the highest-quality research skills as well as providing transferable skills training. Further details of training programmes for postgraduate students in Russell Group universities are given in **Annex E**).

Finish Up, Move On is a two-day **Imperial College London** skills training programme which focuses in particular on post-PhD transition for late-stage doctorate students. Topics covered included: writing a thesis, preparing for a viva voce, self-awareness, career options, networking skills, leadership and entrepreneurship. The programme aims to develop the subset of the UK Research Councils' Joint Skills Statement relating to personal effectiveness, career management and skills associated with communicating, networking and team working. It won the 2008 *Times Higher Education* award for outstanding support for early career researchers.

69. Russell Group universities are continuing to improve the postgraduate student experience and meet research students' expectations. The Russell Group was pleased that 81% of research students in the 2007 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) indicated that overall their degree programme met or exceeded their expectations. The high numbers of international postgraduate students who attend Russell Group universities (52 per cent of overseas research students in the UK) also indicate the high quality of the postgraduate student experience in Russell Group universities.

³⁷ Based on HESA data. 30% of all RG students are postgraduate students (headcount data, all levels and modes, including all UK, EU and overseas students).

70. For Postgraduate students the interplay between teaching and research is absolutely fundamental. The Post Graduate Research Experience Survey shows that the 'intellectual climate' is regarded by PGR students as one of the most important factors in successful completion of their research degree. This includes opportunities to become involved in the wider research culture, and whether the research ambience is stimulating to the student's work. This research-led learning environment is likely to be a key factor in the high numbers of Russell Group university undergraduate students that proceed to further study³⁸; the recent Thrift review³⁹ noted the importance of research experiences at undergraduate level in promoting research careers.

International Student Experience

71. International student experience and satisfaction of teaching and learning at Russell Group universities can be seen from recent studies by i-graduate's International Student Barometer (ISB). ISB is the largest study of the international student experience, the latest results based on feedback from nearly 25,000 students at Russell Group universities. The results for the 2007 wave from Russell Group international students found that:

- International students had a **higher rate of overall satisfaction at Russell Group universities** than the average overall benchmark.
- In selecting a university, **97%** of students noted **teaching quality** and **90% noted research quality** as important determining factors in choosing a Russell Group university.
- 95% of students believe their lecturers are experts in their subject area
- 89% were satisfied with the academic content of their course
- 87% noted their satisfaction with the ability to study with a range of multicultural peers
- 84% were satisfied with their ability to get personal support and time from academic staff when it was needed
- 82% of students noted that research at the university was an important learning element of their course
- Over three quarters of students were satisfied that their learning would help them secure a career

³⁸ In 2001-02, of the 10 higher education institutions with the highest percentage of first degree graduates progressing to research postgraduate study within 6 months, 6 were Russell Group universities (Cambridge (13.9%); Imperial (11%); Oxford (10.1%); Birmingham (6%); UCL (5.3%) and Newcastle (5%).) (HESA data for 2001-02.) This trend has been maintained in recent years; in 2006-07 over half of students progressing to postgraduate research degrees were from Russell Group universities (3,365 of 7,725); nine Russell Group universities were in the top ten institutions with the highest number of students progressing to postgraduate research study (all Russell Group universities are in the top thirty). HESA, *Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education 2006-07*, 2008; data for leavers progressing to a higher degree mainly by research.

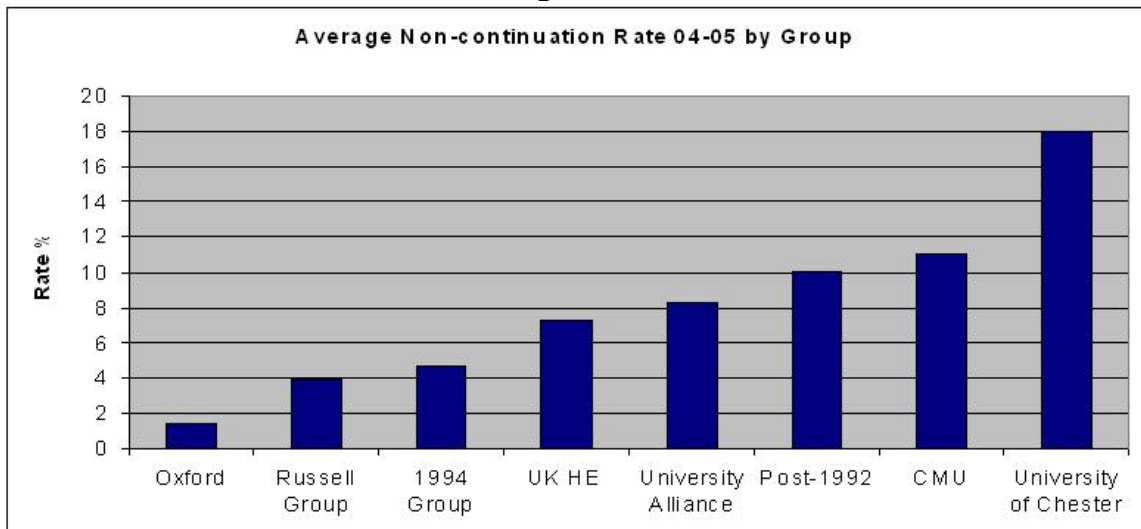
³⁹ Thrift, N. *Research Careers in the UK: A Review*, published by DIUS, 2008, p.15.

Question 12: examples of reasons for, and potential strategies to reduce, the non-completion of higher education programmes by students

Retention

72. Prior attainment and university student experience, including student support, are two of the key factors affecting retention rates in the UK. Despite some of the most rigorous academic courses, the average Russell Group non-completion rate in 2005-06 for young, first degree students was just 4.3% – below the Government's benchmarks. For the Russell Group institutions in England, the non-completion rate is as low as 3.8%. In comparison, some non-Russell Group institutions in the UK have non-completion rates as high as 30%. The 2006-07 HESA widening participation performance indicators demonstrate that students from low participation neighbourhoods are about half as likely to drop out of a Russell Group university as other UK universities.
73. The chart below, from the 2007 National Audit Office report, shows that for the Russell Group institutions in England the non-completion rate is as low as 3.8%. This is the **lowest non-continuation rates of any university group**.

National Audit Office report, 2007: “Staying the course: the retention of students in higher education”



Source: NAO, 2007

74. A large body of evidence (including the 2007 National Audit Office report ‘Staying the course: the retention of students in higher education’) also points to student experience as being one of the most important reasons for students’ non-completion.

Question 13: *the adequacy of UK higher education (HE) funding and student support packages, and implications for current and future levels of student debt*

Russell Group Bursaries

75. First, it is important to re-state that there is a robust body of evidence which demonstrates that **academic attainment** before the age of 18 is the most important factor in whether a student will go on to higher education, **not financial considerations**. When A-level grades are taken into account, students from deprived and wealthy backgrounds are equally likely to go to university. So it is not surprising that under the new system of fees, loans and grants, **applications to English universities have continued to increase from students of all social backgrounds**.
76. However, we are concerned about evidence which suggests that some students may be put off applying to a Russell Group university as a result of false preconceptions, misinformation, lack of confidence or misunderstandings about the costs and financial support available. For example, evidence from Canada shows that students from working-class backgrounds overestimate the costs of going to university and underestimate the returns.
77. Russell Group universities want to ensure all students have the financial help they need and to try to overcome some of these barriers by offering very generous bursaries. Since the introduction of the fees regime, all our institutions have **greatly increased the amount of financial support** given to students from low income families through bursaries. OFFA data attests to the enormous efforts Russell Group universities have made to help less well-off students: in 2006-07 the Group spent well over £20 million of additional fee income (AFI) on support for low income students – a greater share of Additional Fee Income than the sector as a whole and nearly £500,000 more than the sector average per institution.
- The value of bursaries and scholarships that the Russell Group universities in England will provide is steadily increasing, rising to an average of over £5 million per institution by 2010-2011.
 - On average, each Russell Group university spent £1,265,000 on bursaries (22% of AFI) in 2006-07, compared to a sector average of £779,000 (21% of AFI).⁴⁰
 - On average across the Russell Group, students from the lowest income backgrounds received guaranteed bursarial support of £1,680 in 2006-07 (based on OFFA figures). This is almost six times the minimum bursary of £300 required by OFFA. In some institutions, guaranteed support is as much as £4,000 in the first year of study and £3,000 thereafter.
 - This guaranteed support is supplemented by a large number of schemes targeted at high-achieving students as well as under-represented groups.

⁴⁰ National Audit Office report, "Widening Participation in Higher Education", Appendix- page 53 (based on OFFA figures)

- Several of our institutions significantly exceeded their estimated spends on outreach and/or bursarial support.⁴¹

Outreach Spend

78. The average amount of additional fee income spent on outreach in a Russell Group institution is £286,000 compared to a sector average of £168,000. This is over £100,000 additional expenditure per institution on average. The proportion of AFI spend on outreach is also higher than the sector average (5.7% compared to 5.3%). However, this figure does not capture the very large sums already being spent on outreach from existing budgets that is not from additional fee income.
79. Funding devoted by Russell Group universities to outreach has grown by nearly £5m. This is in addition to the very large sums already committed to outreach from existing budgets.

National Bursary Scheme

80. Several organisations have recently advocated a national bursary scheme. Calls for such a scheme would be understandable if there were no financial assistance available for students in need. But this is not the case. The current system of student support in England is one of the most generous in the world. We **already have a 'national bursary scheme'** in the form of a guaranteed level of support for disadvantaged students through government grants, subsidised loans and no upfront fees. To suggest that it is somehow wrong for universities to then choose to top up this support with bursaries that far exceed the amount originally required by OFFA seems misguided. On average, Russell Group universities have spent more on bursaries than any other part of the sector, with over £20 million invested in 2006-07.
81. There is no evidence that a national bursary system would widen participation, and it is likely to hamper the efforts of Russell Group universities to encourage students from non-traditional backgrounds to apply. Potential students should be encouraged not only to progress to higher education but also to choose the university and course that best suits their aptitude and maximises their life-chances. Research from the Sutton Trust has shown that some state school students are put off applying to leading universities because of lack of information (particularly about the costs and benefits of going to a top university); and low expectations and aspirations. **Bursaries are one tool to help overcome these barriers and persuade students from non-traditional backgrounds to consider the best university and course for them.**
82. Research at one Russell Group university found that 80% of lower-income entrants in 2006 said the bursary scheme influenced their decision to choose that institution. In the same year the proportion of low-income students rose.⁴²

⁴¹ These include: LSE, Imperial, Liverpool, Oxford, Sheffield and Manchester

⁴² (Nottingham <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/wideningparticipation/students/support.htm>)

A survey from the Sutton Trust found 51% of those educated in state schools believed there is no difference in earnings between higher education institutions, compared with 35% from independent schools. The Sutton Trust report “Primed for Success” called for university candidates to be told that they will enjoy higher salaries if they graduate from “prestigious universities”, citing the wage premium outlined in the 2008 London School of Economics’ Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) report *University Quality and Graduate Wages in the UK*.
<http://www.suttontrust.com/annualreports.asp>)

83. A national bursary system would create many losers and few winners as there would be relatively small increases to a standard bursary but many high-achieving, low income students would lose out on substantial support currently available. They and their institutions would effectively be ‘taxed’ and their bursaries given to other universities. This is not only unfair but also threatens to undermine many of the efforts institutions are making to improve the student experience and to widen participation.
84. It is important to keep the link between students' fees and the institution they attend as one way of ensuring that the learning experience continues to improve. Similarly, being forced to pool income from fees is likely to damage institutions' efforts to encourage philanthropic giving because donors usually want their contribution to benefit students in their chosen university. Any forced pooling of funds would also restrict a university's ability to invest in its own projects to widen participation.
85. Bursaries are important in encouraging applicants to applying to leading universities but **financial support alone does little to help** those who have neither the qualifications nor the aspirations to go to university.
86. Finally, the complexities of trying to manage a national bursary system centrally make any such scheme impractical and expensive.

Implications for current and future student debt

87. It is important to put discussions about student ‘debt’ in the context of the factual information available.
88. There is a robust body of evidence which demonstrates that **academic attainment** before the age of 18 is the most important factor in whether a student will go on to higher education, **not financial considerations**. When A-level grades are taken into account, students from deprived and wealthy backgrounds are equally likely to go to university. So it is not surprising that under the new system of fees, loans and grants, applications to English universities have continued to increase from students of all social backgrounds.

89. More people than ever, including students from low-income households, are entering higher education and making use of support arrangements. That in itself is highly encouraging. The system of student support in England remains one of the most generous - and expensive - in the world. Students pay **no up-front fees; grants and bursaries are given to students from poor backgrounds, and there is no real interest rate on loans.** Tax-payers pay a relatively high subsidy to provide interest-free loans for all students no matter what they or their parents earn.
90. The vast majority of students recognise that attending a Russell Group university is a worthwhile investment in their future. However, because of the importance of widening participation to higher education, it is important to tackle any false preconceptions.
91. One route to doing so is for the Government and universities to ensure that all those who can benefit from going to university receive **accurate advice and guidance** about the cost and benefits of attending university and the financial support available. Russell Group universities continue to work hard to raise awareness of the support available and Russell Group bursaries are higher, on average, than any other part of the sector – around 6 times the required OFFA minimum bursary.
92. The benefits of attending a Russell Group university are considerable. Demand for Russell Group graduates remains high and there is a **significant earnings premium associated with attending a Russell Group university:**
- Studying at a Russell Group university confers a wage premium of around 10%⁴³
 - Research from the LSE shows that attending a ‘higher quality’ institution leads to higher wages of between 10 and 16 per cent⁴⁴
 - Russell Group starting salaries are, on average, £3,000 higher than for other graduates⁴⁵
93. These figures are averages of course and, therefore, it important that any **low-earners continue to be protected through the repayment system** – through a minimum earnings threshold for starting repayment, income contingent repayments and debt being written off after 25 years. This means that low-earners are subsidised so that those who do not receive an economic benefit from their degree

⁴³ <http://cee.lse.ac.uk/cee%20dps/ceedp33.pdf>

Research undertaken by the Centre for Economics of Education has identified an average wage premium of 9.4% for a graduate from a Russell Group university compared to a graduate from a modern university. This statistic comes from an OLS linear estimation technique, which controls for individual characteristics including A-level scores, parental background, and the school the individual attended among other factors affecting wages. “Does it pay to attend a prestigious university?” Arnaud Chevalier and Gavan Conlon, 2003, Centre for the Economics of Education, LSE (table 5 for the 1995 cohort, page 29).

⁴⁴ ⁴⁴ One study shows that if a student attends an institution in the highest quartile - as determined by a number of different quality measures (RAE scores, retention rates, and tariff scores) – this leads to a higher wage of between 10 and 16 per cent (depending on the measure) compared to an individual who attends an institution in the lowest quartile. Although the report does not identify individual institutions, Russell Group universities achieve high RAE score, retention rates and tariff scores so it is very likely they are in the top quartile of institutions in the UK. “University Quality and Graduate Wages in the UK” Hussain, McNally and Telhaj, 2009, Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics.

⁴⁵ HESA, 2005-06

are not burdened with repayments. Discussions about future student debt need to be informed by the repayment conditions of that debt.

94. In the public debate regarding **debt-aversion**, this is often confused or conflated with **risk-aversion**. Whilst there is considerable evidence to demonstrate that those in low-earning households hold significant levels of private debt (sometimes used to demonstrate that this group are generally not debt-averse) it is rational economic behaviour for individuals from low-income backgrounds to be risk-averse. This is exactly why the current system was set up so that almost **all of the risk is held by the Government** – not the individual.
95. The protection in place for low-earners and the zero rate of real interest means that **this 'debt' is unlike any private credit-card or mortgage-style debt**. This is highly expensive to sustain but it means that - with proper information and guidance - even the most risk-averse student should not be put off attending university and receiving the benefits of doing so.
96. Unpublished research undertaken by the University of Nottingham would suggest that this awareness regarding different types of debt is filtering down to potential university applicants. The continuing growth in applications across all social class groups would support this. This does not mean that anyone can afford to be complacent, however, and improving the provision of accurate and timely **information and guidance** for young people about the **costs, benefits, and financial support** available to students remains a priority.

Question 14: any further action required by the Government and/or HEFCE to ensure that UK HEIs offer students a world-class educational experience

97. Russell Group universities continue to perform well against their major global competitors. This success is **good news for the UK**, as major research-intensive universities are vital to promoting **economic prosperity** and improving quality of life in this country. UK higher education makes a significant contribution to the UK economy of around £45 billion⁴⁶ (more than the pharmaceutical or aircraft industries) and is becoming increasingly important in the UK's high-value-added, knowledge economy.
98. Russell Group universities are, however, very concerned about their ability to sustain this level of success in the face of **fierce global competition**. International league tables reflect the growing strength of our major competitors - particularly the US institutions - who benefit from much higher levels of investment than UK universities. On core educational services alone the US spends more than double per student and as a proportion of GDP, the **US invests over twice as much as the UK** on higher education.⁴⁷ Their major research-intensive universities are amongst the largest beneficiaries. For example, the endowment fund of the University of Harvard alone is greater than the total public funding for all universities in England in any given year.⁴⁸
99. But increased competition doesn't come solely from the US. As a result of huge investment in higher education and science in recent years, China already looks set to overtake the UK very soon in terms of total research publications, and its universities have been steadily climbing up international league tables. Funding for higher education is also increasing rapidly in India, the Middle East, Brazil and Australia. Closer to home, France and Germany are both undertaking major programmes to invest millions of Euros into their leading research universities, with the aim of improving their international standing.
100. While this Government has increased investment in major areas of science, innovation and research, maintained the unit of funding and introduced variable fees, the two major areas of academic activity, namely teaching and research, are still **significantly underfunded**, particularly in comparison to our main international competitors.
101. In the current economic climate there is likely to be increased pressure on public spending on higher education and research including Research Council budgets and QR spending. There are also signs that R&D investment from business will be affected and charities funding for research may be reduced. This is all at a time when university costs are increasing (people, energy, the cost of borrowing).
102. Without **access to increased investment** there is a real danger that the UK's success will not be sustained.

⁴⁶ UUK *The Economic Impact of UK Higher Education Institutions* (2006)

⁴⁷ OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2007

⁴⁸ Harvard's endowment was \$36.9 billion in 2008 <http://www.news.harvard.edu/glance/>

UK investment in HE – international comparisons

- Based on OECD data from *Education at a Glance 2008*, the UK's annual expenditure on HE is lower than many other OECD countries in terms of expenditure per student, proportion of GDP and share of public spending on education.
- Annual expenditure on higher education (for all services including research activity) per student shows that the UK is spending less than many of its main competitors – US, Australia, Switzerland, the Netherlands and most Nordic countries.
- The UK spends approximately \$13,506 (USD) per student while the US spends almost double that at \$24,370 (Australia spends \$14,579). Relative to GDP per capita, the US spends 35% more per student.
- The UK spends below the OECD average on higher education as a percentage of GDP. The US spends 2.9%, Canada 2.6%, Korea 2.4%, while the UK spends 1.3%. This is below the percentage spending by Greece and Poland on HE.
- Taking public spending alone, the UK's expenditure on HE institutions is 0.9% of GDP - the same in percentage terms as Portugal, Hungary and Mexico.
- When all public expenditure is factored in, including public subsidies for living costs, the UK spends 1.2% on HE, close to the US (and the OECD average) at 1.3% and Australia at 1.1%. However, Nordic countries typically spend over 2%.
- The UK's public expenditure on HE is 23% of total educational spending. This is close to the OECD average, but below the proportion of spending on HE in Germany (25%), the US (26%) and Canada (34%).

International investment in research-intensive universities:

- According to DIUS report 'International comparative performance of the UK research base' (2008) China's total publications have increased fourfold in the past decade and look set to overtake the UK in 2008.
- In 2007, the Indian government announced £7 billion investment over 5 years for higher education. The Prime Minister plans to create 40 new Institutes of Technology and Management.
- The new King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia is likely to be the richest university in the world outside USA.
- In Brazil, 10,000 PhDs and 30,000 Masters students will graduate in 2009 – a 10 fold increase in 20 years
- In 2007, it was announced that the Australian government will provide £2.5 billion one-time payoff for universities.
- The recent higher education bill in France will pump billions into HE, increasing operating budgets by 50% over the next 5 yrs.
- In Germany, the 'Excellence Initiative' has designated nine universities as 'elite', and will provide them with a total of €1.9 billion in extra research funding over the next 5 years. In addition, 39 graduate schools are receiving €5 million over 5 years to support PhD training.

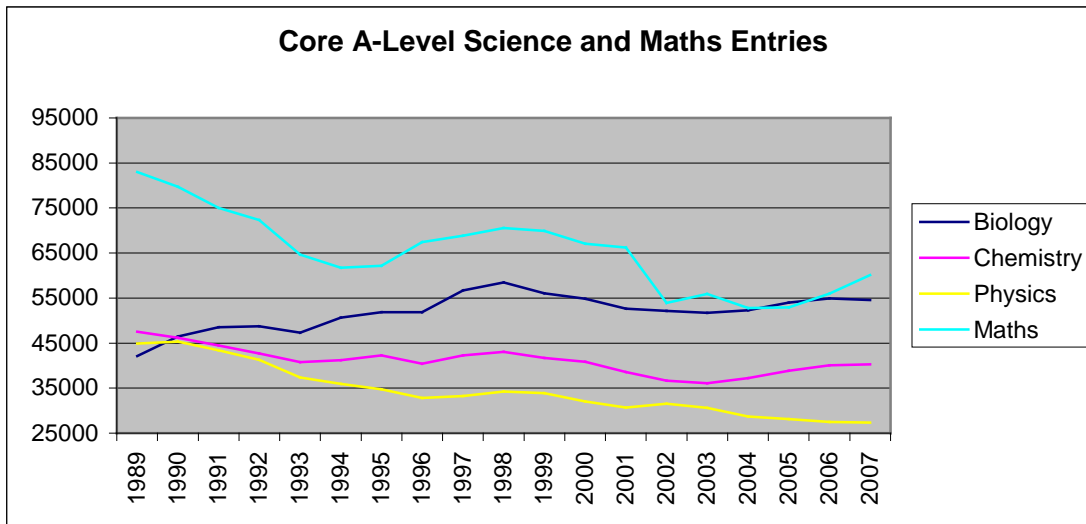
ANNEX A: A-levels and STEM subjects (from Section 1)

The Russell Group remains concerned by the long-term decline in pupils taking science and mathematics (STEM subjects) at GCSE and A-level. Numeracy is essential for many undergraduate courses at our universities, particularly in engineering, economics and medicine.

In order to improve science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) teaching in schools, Russell Group universities are building strong relationships with local schools and colleges as well as engaging with curriculum reform.

Declining numbers of pupils in 'subjects of strategic importance'

- Students taking 'traditional' subjects (physical sciences, maths, languages) at A-level have become worryingly low despite a few recent trend-bucking increases.



- As the graph shows, although there have been some recent improvements, from 1989-2007 entries have fallen by 28% (maths), 39% (physics) and 15% (chemistry) despite total entries soaring 25%.
- From 1989-2004, maths entries fell by 40%. Following curriculum changes from 2006-7, the number of candidates taking maths has started to increase.
- In 2007-8, the number of candidates taking maths rose by 7.5% while science subjects saw increases in chemistry (3.5%), biology (2.7%) and physics (2.3%).
- However, these numbers remain significantly below their previous levels after almost two decades of decline.

Sector Variation in subject choices

- Non-selective state school students are far less likely to take key subjects like Chemistry and Physics at A-level.
- Only 2.6% of media studies A-level entries are from independent schools compared to 15% of entries on average across subjects.

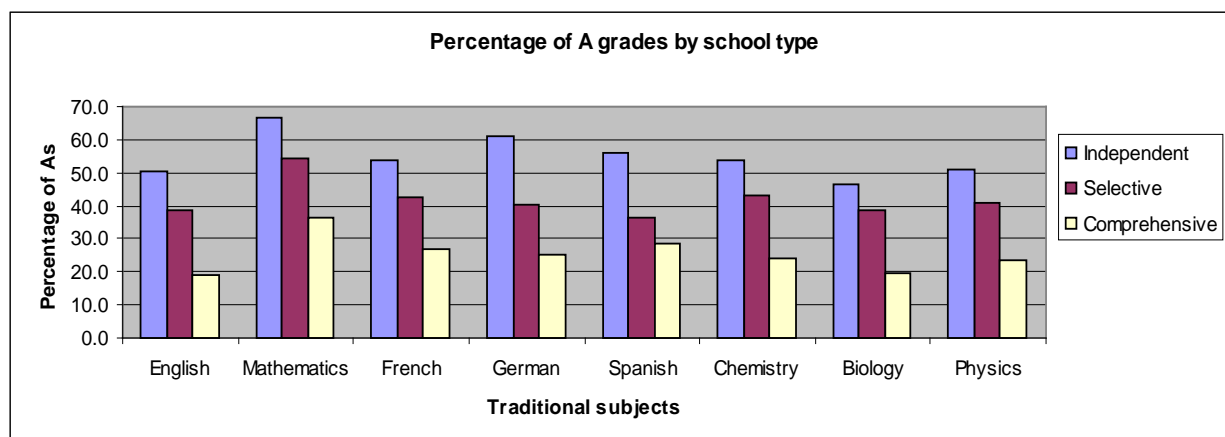
Subject	Non-selective state entries (2006)	% non-selective state	Independent entries (2006)	% Independent
Law	12,991	96%	188	1.4%
Media Studies	21,289	93%	603	2.6%
Psychology	41,816	86%	2799	5.7%
PE	17,699	82%	2,336	10.8%
All (England)	532,318	74%	109,870	15%

- It is overwhelmingly **state school students dropping sciences and languages**.
- Independent and grammar school students are **far more likely to take traditional subjects**, such as STEM, and more likely to get the top grades in those subjects.
- 60% of modern language A grades come from in independent schools.

Sector variation in STEM subjects

- A 2006 survey by electronics firm Siemens of 500 students found that **70% of 6th-form pupils believed it was harder to get an A grade in science subjects**. For two thirds of those surveyed, the perceived level of difficulty was a key factor in deciding whether to choose these subjects.
- While independent schools represent only 7-8% of the total school population, just under half of all science A grades are from those schools.

A-level Attainment in STEM subjects



Reference: Achievement and Attainment Tables for 2006-07, Department for Children, Schools and Families.

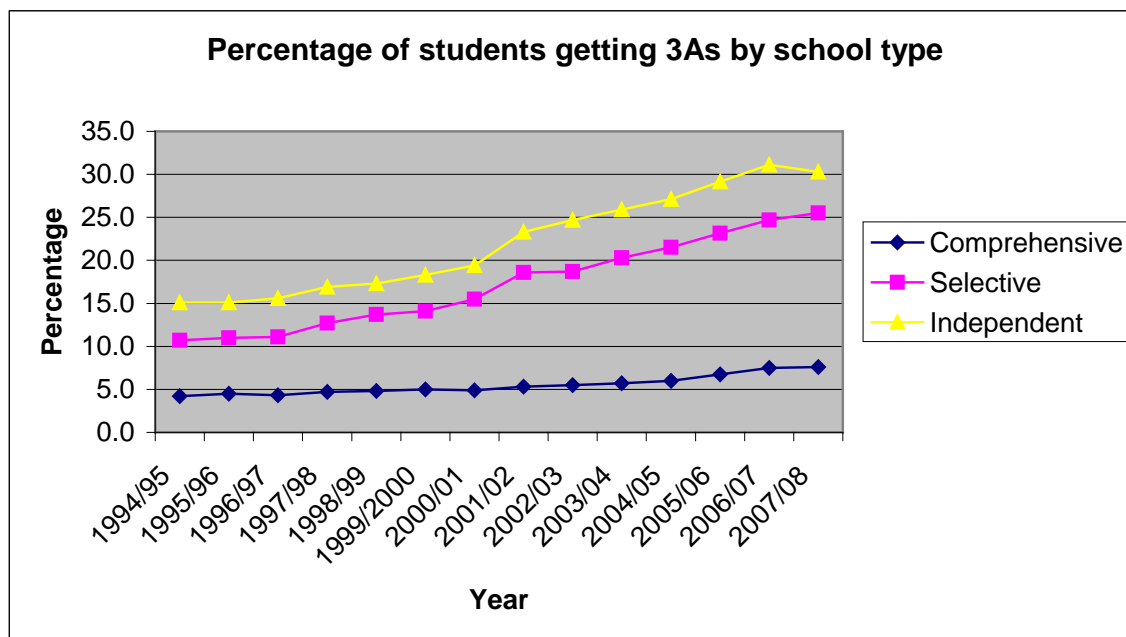
- The percentage of candidates passing A-level qualifications rose this year by 0.3% to 97.2% while the proportion achieving A grades rose by 0.6% to 25.9%.⁴⁹
- Between 2002 and 2008, the independent sector saw an increase of 9.1% in the number of A grades awarded - from 41.3% to 50.4%. Over the same period, top grades at comprehensive schools rose by only 3.9 points to 20.4%.⁵⁰
- 2008 results have shown that **some of the biggest increases in A grades awarded were in science subjects** – notably Chemistry (up by 1.3% to 33.7% of the total) and Physics (up by 1% to 31.8%). In addition, there were also slight increases in those receiving A grades in both maths (up 0.3% to 44%) and further maths (up 0.7% to 57.5%).⁵¹

⁴⁹ JCQ (2008). "Results 2008": <http://www.jcq.org.uk/attachments/published/984/JCQ%20A-Level%20Results%202008.pdf>

⁵⁰ Achievement and Attainment Tables, Data Services Group, Department for Children, Schools and Families

⁵¹ JCQ (2008). "Results 2008": <http://www.jcq.org.uk/attachments/published/984/JCQ%20A-Level%20Results%202008.pdf>

Straight A grades



Reference: Proportion of 16-18 year old A-level candidates achieving at least three A grades at A-level

- Nearly 12% of candidates achieved 3 A grades at A-level in 2007-08; 6% achieving 4As.
- 22% of A-level students come from independent (14%) and grammar schools (8%). **These students account for over half (55.8%) of those gaining 3As.**
- This compares to the 45% (or roughly 117,000) of A-level applicants that go to comprehensive schools, of which only 7.6% (9,000) gain 3As.⁵²
- Independent school students are around three times more likely to gain straight A grades than those at maintained schools.

School education and STEM

- The quality of STEM education in schools can often have a profound impact on retention of students in university. According to a 2007 NAO report “science, technology, engineering and mathematics students are ...less likely to continue to a second year of study than students following other subjects.”⁵³
- This attainment at A-levels relates closely to prior achievement at GCSE. The percentage of pupils gaining at least one science GCSE grade C is 47% for mainstream schools, 59% for specialist science schools, 86% for independent schools and 95% for grammar schools.

⁵² Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008). “TABLES FOR GCE/VCE A/AS AND EQUIVALENT EXAMINATION RESULTS 2008”, Table 1.

⁵³ NAO Report, ‘Staying the course: The retention of students in higher education’, July 2007

- Those studying separate science subjects at GCSE in maintained schools are **less likely to gain an A grade than those in independent schools**. Independent schools account for a third of triple science entries and gain over 50% of the A* grades, similarly, they account for around 7% of mathematics entries, but over 30% of A* grades.
- In international studies of school attainment, the UK ranks 13th among 30 countries in reading, 18th amongst 30 countries in maths, and 9th out of 30 in science.⁵⁴ Attainment in English, sciences and maths has shown a leveling off since the late 1990s, particularly in Key Stages 2 and 3⁵⁵.
- In 2007, close to 47% of pupils did not achieve the benchmark of 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C.
- In 2005 roughly **80% of physics teachers in independent schools had a degree in physics, compared to only 30% of those in state schools**⁵⁶. Almost one in four secondary schools in England no longer has any specialist physics teachers⁵⁷.
- In 2001, only 6-7% of the cohort entered each of the separate sciences ('triple science') at GCSE. As of 2005 only 27% of maintained schools even offered triple science at GCSE. While this has increased to 32% in 2007, this means that **less than one third of state school provided the opportunity to take all three separate science subjects**.
- Science A-level candidates are concentrated in a small proportion of schools, as the Royal Society noted, "science take-up is strongly skewed at present, with half of all A-level entries in science coming from just 18 per cent of schools."⁵⁸

⁵⁴ OECD (2006). PISA project: <http://www.pisa.oecd.org/redirect/>

⁵⁵ Sodha, S. and J. Margo (2008). "Thursday's Child". London: IPPR.



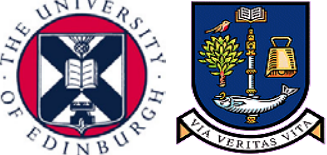
⁵⁶ Smithers, A and P. Robinson (2005). "Physics in Schools and Colleges: Teacher Deployment and Student Outcomes". Centre for Education and Employment Research, University of Buckingham.

⁵⁷ IBID





⁵⁸ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200506/ldselect/ldsctech/257/25705.htm>



ANNEX B: Special entry routes for non-traditional students at Russell Group universities (from Section 1)

A foundation course is an additional year at the beginning of a degree which prepares students without the standard required qualifications for their chosen course. Foundation courses are designed to help these students 'catch-up' with the students who have entered a course through a conventional route. These rigorous programmes ensure that they will have the necessary skills, experience and knowledge to succeed in their degree. They are specifically designed to provide additional support and tuition to students in their transition to higher education.

<p>University of Birmingham</p> 	<p>Birmingham offers foundation years in various science & engineering disciplines. Successful completion of the course guarantees students a place on their chosen degree programme. Foundation year courses are suitable for those whose qualifications are not recognised for direct entry to a degree programme, including mature students.</p>
<p>Cardiff University</p> 	<p>Engineering, Medicine & Dentistry Preliminary Years are designed to give students the necessary basic knowledge to enable them to cope on an engineering or dentistry degree at the University. Students who successfully complete the year will then be able to move on to the degree programmes.</p>
<p>University of Edinburgh and University of Glasgow</p> 	<p>SWAP (Scottish Wider Access Partnership) is a partnership of further and higher education institutions, which creates opportunities for mature students with no qualifications to access university. The SWAP programme prepares students for entry into higher education and guarantees them a place at a college or university if they complete the programme successfully.</p>

<p>King's College London</p> 	<p>Extended Medical Degree Programme (EMDP) is a six year degree programme launched in 2001 to encourage students from disadvantaged backgrounds to become doctors. Places on the programme are offered to talented pupils from targeted inner London boroughs that have the potential to succeed in medicine but not the predicted A-Level grades required for the standard medical programme. These places are additional to those previously allocated to King's for entry by conventional routes.</p>
<p>University of Leeds</p>  <p>UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS</p>	<p>Interdisciplinary Science Foundation Year (for science, engineering and math courses) enables students without standard entry qualifications to progress on to a wide range of science, computing, engineering and healthcare degrees at the University. The foundation year provides students with a solid academic base in science and mathematics.</p>
<p>University of Liverpool</p> 	<p>Liverpool runs various 1+3 and 2+2 foundation courses with local FE colleges as progression opportunities into university degrees. These include degree programmes in medicine and dentistry, science and engineering, computer science and information systems, earth sciences, geography, mathematics and physical sciences.</p>
<p>University of Manchester</p> 	<p>Manchester's runs three foundation year programmes in life sciences, sciences and engineering, which consist of a one year programme designed to improve students' scientific knowledge and understanding to a level that is suitable for a degree in those fields. This programme is geared towards students with non-traditional qualification and those who have slightly underachieved in their science A levels.</p>
<p>University of Newcastle</p> 	<p>Foundation Year provides an introductory year to a number of engineering, science and mathematics degree courses, designed for those who have shown that they have the ability to succeed but lack the necessary qualifications to enter the degree directly.</p>

<p>University of Nottingham</p> 	<p>Science & Engineering Foundation Years are designed for students whose school qualifications do not meet the current admissions' requirements for entry to undergraduate programmes. The programme provides grounding in the fundamentals of science and mathematics. In addition to classroom and laboratory activities, all foundation students are allocated a personal tutor to provide advice and guidance.</p>
<p>Queen's University Belfast</p> 	<p>The Highway to Science and Engineering Programme is a one year programme designed to provide those from disadvantaged backgrounds who have just failed to meet their required grades a supported route into Science or Engineering degree courses. Available for students from Discovering Queen's schools, successful completion of this foundation programme leads to the awarding of a Foundation Certificate and entry to certain Science & Engineering courses.</p>
<p>University of Sheffield</p> 	<p>Engineering and science foundation years are designed for those who have not studied the courses in school that would prepare them to move directly into the degree programme. They are aimed at students who, for whatever reason, need additional preparation or additional science subjects before going on to an engineering or science degree.</p>
<p>University of Southampton</p> 	<p>Foundation year is the first year of a four or five-year programme leading to a degree in engineering, computer science, physics or geophysics disciplines. Successful completion of the year guarantees progression to degree programmes.</p> <p>BM6 (Bachelor of Medicine in 6 Years) is a programme developed to widen access into the medical profession from those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It involves studying for an extra year on a specially designed foundation course before joining the students on the conventional 'BM5' programme.</p>

<p>University College London</p> 	<p>Foundation Year in Engineering is part of a four-year degree programme in engineering, specifically designed for applicants who have not studied suitable subjects prior to entry but have attained the required academic level. The first year is an introduction to mathematics, physics and engineering principles.</p>
<p>University of Warwick</p> 	<p>The 2+2 Degree Programme provides a path for students to gain a degree through two years of study at a local college and a further two years at the University. This programme is specifically designed for adults who lack formal qualifications and who wish to return to education.</p>

ANNEX C: Excellence in teaching and research in Russell Group universities (from section 2)

All Russell Group universities are clear that their aims are to deliver excellence in both research and teaching.⁵⁹

Research excellence

- Russell Group universities' strengths in research are clear from the results of the 2001 RAE, in which **78 per cent of academic staff in Grade 5* departments** and 57 per cent of staff in Grade 5 departments were based in Russell Group universities. This shows that much of the UK's highest-quality research is carried out by academics employed in Russell Group universities, meaning that students at a Russell Group university will have the opportunity to be taught by and learn from academics performing internationally-recognised research at the leading edge of their fields.
- The research excellence in Russell Group universities helps to drive the UK's position as an international leader in research.⁶⁰ Evidence shows that the **UK is number one in the G8 of advanced industrial nations for research productivity**⁶¹: UK researchers produce 16 research papers per \$1 million of research funding – compared to 9.9 in the US and 3.6 in Japan.⁶² The UK's high level of productivity is a particularly good return given that the UK is ranked seventh in the G8 for public funding for research.⁶³ Furthermore, the UK is second only to the US in research excellence – with 1 per cent of the world's population we produce 9 per cent of publications and account for 12 per cent of citations. On average, UK scientists receive about 10% of internationally recognised science prizes. Most of these are conferred on academic staff at Russell Group universities.
- Russell Group universities are among the UK's leading research-intensive institutions and produce a significant proportion of the UK's high quality research, demonstrated through their share of research income – both in terms of QR funding from the Funding Councils, and competitively awarded grant income from the Research Councils:
 - in 2007-08 Russell Group universities were allocated 65.6 per cent of QR funding from HEFCE⁶⁴;
 - in terms of income from Research Council grants, Russell Group universities accounted for 68.5 per cent of research income from the

⁵⁹ This is highlighted on websites and in strategic plans.

⁶⁰ For example, all of the UK universities in the top 100 of the 2008 Shanghai Jiao Tong Academic Rankings of World Universities are Russell Group universities.

⁶¹ *International comparative performance of the UK research base*, Evidence Ltd / Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, July 2008.

⁶² Universities UK, *Spending Review 2007: Securing the Future*.

<http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/downloads/SR2007.pdf>

⁶³ The UK spent 1.82% of GDP on R&D compared to an average of 2.24% according to a study of 21 comparator nations (PSA target metrics for the UK research base, Evidence Ltd / Office of Science and Innovation, 2007).

⁶⁴ HEFCE, "Recurrent Grants for 2007-08: final allocations" (October 2007/32).

- Research Councils in 2006-07 (increasing from 67.6 per cent in 2005-06)⁶⁵;
- o additionally, Russell Group universities gained 66% of total grant income⁶⁶ in 2006-07.⁶⁷

Teaching excellence

- The teaching excellence at Russell Group universities is reflected in the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) institutional audits (which include a consideration of the management of academic standards). Of the nineteen Russell Group universities that have received QAA institutional review reports to assess teaching quality, all have been awarded "broad confidence" (the highest level). Russell Group university staff have also been individually recognised through the Higher Education Academy's National Teaching Fellowship - **as of 2008, fifty-five academics at Russell Group universities have been awarded Fellowships.**⁶⁸ Additionally, sixteen of the seventy-four HEFCE-funded Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning are based in Russell Group universities⁶⁹, a number of which specifically focus on research and enquiry-based learning, and fourteen of the twenty-four HEA Subject Centres, showing that much of the subject-specific support to improve learning experiences is based at Russell Group universities⁷⁰.
- National Student Survey (NSS) results show that student satisfaction of teaching quality across The Russell Group is very high at 86 per cent - above the sector average (83 per cent) - according to the 2008 survey. Some of our universities rate as highly as 92 per cent.⁷¹
- Student experience and students' satisfaction with teaching and learning at Russell Group universities can also be found from recent studies of international student experience. The i-graduate's International Student Barometer (ISB)⁷² is the largest study of the international student experience, the latest results based on feedback from nearly 25,000 students at Russell Group universities. These results from Russell Group international students found that:
 - o In selecting a university, **97%** of students noted **teaching quality** and **90% noted research quality** as important determining factors in choosing a Russell Group university.
 - o 95% of students believe their lectures are experts in their subject area

⁶⁵ HESA data for 2006-07.

⁶⁶ This includes income from Research Councils, Funding Councils, charities and industry.

⁶⁷ HESA data for 2006-07.

⁶⁸ This is out of a total of 235 awards since the scheme's inception in 2000 – staff at Russell Group universities have received a disproportionate number of awards (18 per cent of the total) compared to Russell Group universities' share of the UK higher education sector (11 per cent)

⁶⁹ This number (22 per cent of all CETLs) is disproportionate to Russell Group universities' share of the English higher education sector (13 per cent).

⁷⁰ Again, Russell Group universities account for a disproportionate number of Subject Centres (58 per cent) compared to their share of the sector (11 per cent).

⁷¹ Overall satisfaction rates with the student experience across The Russell Group are also high at 86% on average - this is also above the sector average and a further increase from 2007. Some institutions have rates as high as 93%.

Source: unistats.

⁷² http://www.i-graduate.org/services/student_insight--student_barometer.html

- 82% of students noted that research at the university was an important learning element of their course
- International students had a higher rate of overall satisfaction at Russell Group universities than the average overall benchmark.

The added value of research and teaching excellence

- It is clear from the evidence above that students **benefit from receiving excellent teaching** at Russell Group universities. It is also clear that an environment of research excellence offers students first hand **exposure to leading edge research, scholarship and innovation**.
- Furthermore, research shows that Russell Group universities' commitment to research excellence helps them to attract the very best minds and the best teachers. In recognition of the advantages of an environment of research excellence, which helps to attract and retain high calibre staff HEFCE has noted: 'the opportunity to engage in research remains one of the most important factors in motivating individuals to enter and remain in the academic profession. This is one of the most important ways in which research benefits teaching'.⁷³
- Research conducted in the UK exploring students' attitudes has found that students felt that they benefited from staff engagement in research because staff were more up to date and learning was more scholarly.⁷⁴ Additionally, a number of studies surveying the views of academic staff in universities have found that a majority of staff believed there was a beneficial link between teaching and research.⁷⁵
- These benefits, however, are just one part of a much wider and richer picture of what it means to be **learning in a research-intensive environment**.

⁷³ Higher Education Funding Council for England, *Fundamental Review of Research Policy and Funding: Final Report of the sub-group to consider the interaction between teaching, research and other activities of HEIs*, 2000, p.6.

⁷⁴ Jenkins, A. et al, "Teaching and research: student perspectives and policy implications" *Studies in Higher Education*, Volume 23, No.2 (1998) 127-141. The authors note, however, that students sometimes felt that staff focused on their research to the detriment of teaching; this suggests the importance of ensuring that teaching has parity with research.

⁷⁵ Halsey, A.H. *Decline of donnish dominion: The British academic profession in the twentieth century*, Clarendon Press, 1992; Kremer, J., "Identifying faculty types using peer ratings of teaching, research and service" *Research In Higher Education*, Volume 32 (1990) 351-361; Neumann, R, "Perceptions of the teaching research nexus: a framework for analysis", *Higher Education*, Vol. 23 No.2, (1992) 159-71; Neumann, "The teaching-research nexus: applying a framework to university students' learning experiences, *European Journal of Education*, Volume 29, No. 3 (1994) 323-339.

ANNEX D: Benefits of research-led learning (from Section 2)

1. On balance, the weight of evidence suggests that research-led learning offers **significant benefits** to students' academic, personal and professional development. (Three broad advantages arising from learning through research can be ascertained):

- the motivation and development of students as a consequence of exposure to expert subject matter;
- promoting the value of enquiry and 'deep' approaches to learning;
- helping to develop transferable skills through engagement in research processes.⁷⁶

The Russell Group believes that research-led learning encourages students to develop independence of thought, entrepreneurial skills and ability to handle uncertainty and new problems – **personal and professional skills** that are integral to the graduate-level jobs that are so important to our knowledge economy.

2. A substantial and growing body of evidence points to the benefits of fostering a research-led learning environment in higher education institutions, and the value of learning through research. These include:
 - **access to high quality research-informed teaching** – recognising the potential for students to be enthused and motivated by leading experts in their field, many Russell Group universities are taking steps to ensure that all students have access to eminent academics early in their university careers⁷⁷;
 - **developing entrepreneurialism and independent learning skills** through enquiry-based learning – students are able to develop an analytical, critical thinking and problem solving skills, including approaching new challenges from different perspectives and in new and innovative ways, all of which are key skills in a rapidly evolving workplace⁷⁸;
 - access to a wide range of career options, including leading professions⁷⁹;
 - promotion of a research ethos and access to research opportunities⁸⁰;

⁷⁶ Blackmore, P. and Fraser, M., "Research and teaching: making the link" in Richard Blackwell and Paul Blackmore (eds.) *Towards Strategic Staff Development in Higher Education*, Open University Press, 2003.

⁷⁷ The various benefits of being taught by research-active academics are summarized in Coate, K., Barnett, R., and Williams, G., "Relationships Between Teaching and Research in Higher Education in England" in *Higher Education Quarterly*, Volume 55, No.2, 158-74, 2001.

⁷⁸ A recent CIHE report looked at the importance of an approach to learning that has problem-solving at its core and the benefits that were identified by employers: CIHE, *Influence through collaboration: Employer Demand for Higher Learning and Engagement with Higher Education*, 2008; <http://www.cihe-uk.com/docs/0809CollabReport.pdf>

⁷⁹ 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.)

⁸⁰ Studies in the US exploring the benefits of undergraduate research experiences have found that undergraduates across all disciplines benefited significantly from these opportunities cognitively, professionally and personally. See Lopatto, D., "What Research on Learning Can Tell Us about Undergraduate Research", presented at the 10th National Conference of the Council on Undergraduate

- positive impacts on students, including improved confidence and motivation.⁸¹

Added-value: the Russell Group student learning experience

- The Russell Group believes that the academic experience in Russell Group universities offers significant advantages to students, not least in terms of the emphasis on the culture of research and enquiry-based learning which encourages the development of independence of thought, critical thinking and analytical skills.
- While no causal relationship can be established, a **clear cumulative added-value factor** can be identified for students and graduates of Russell Group universities:
 - The **high competition for places** (an average of around 8 applications per place across Russell Group universities, and up to 20 applications per place for some courses),
 - **student satisfaction** (85 per cent across Russell Group universities, compared to 81 per cent for the sector),
 - **completion rates** (non-completion is 4.3 per cent on average across Russell Group universities, compared to 7.7 per cent for the sector as a whole),
 - **employer satisfaction** (as discussed above),
 - **external rating of teaching** (shown by positive QAA institutional reviews)
 - high satisfaction ratings for teaching quality in the National Student Survey and, previously, high TQA scores,
 - **attainment rates** and
 - **progression to further study** (Russell Group universities have some of the highest percentages of undergraduates proceeding to postgraduate study)
- Wage premiums – a clear indicator of value in the graduate labour market – demonstrate that Russell Group graduates are highly esteemed by employers because they benefit from some of the **highest returns on their degrees**. Studying at a Russell Group university confers a **wage premium of approximately 10 per cent** compared to modern universities, after accounting for A level scores, parental background, school attended and other factors affecting wages.⁸² It is likely that the education provided by Russell Group

Research, La Crosses, WI, 2004; Seymour, E., et al “Establishing the benefits of research experiences for undergraduates in the sciences: first findings from a three-year study” in *Science Education*, Volume 88, 493-534, 2004; Russell, S., *Evaluation of National Science Foundation Support for Undergraduate Research Opportunities*, 2006.

⁸¹ Russell (2006) found that research-led learning both attracts students with the highest degree expectations and helps to encourage high academic and professional expectations among students.

⁸² Chevalier, A. and Conlon, C., “Does it pay to attend a prestigious university?” 2003, Centre for the Economics of Education, LSE, (table 5 for the 1995 cohort, page 29). A later study by the Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) research shows that if a student attends an institution in the highest quartile - as determined by a number of different quality measures (RAE scores, retention rates, and tariff scores) – this leads to a higher wage of between 10 and 16 per cent (depending on the measure) compared to an individual who attends an institution in the lowest quartile. Although the report does not identify individual institutions, Russell Group universities achieve high RAE scores, retention rates and tariff scores so it is very likely they are in the top quartile of institutions in the UK. Reference: “University Quality and Graduate

universities, with its emphasis on enquiry-based learning and engaging students as independent, critically-minded learners, is a significant factor in producing graduates that are **highly valued by employers**.

- This is further evidenced by the **world-class rating** given to Russell Group graduates **in international employer recruitment surveys**: five Russell Group institutions featured in the top ten in the THES *World University Rankings 2007 Employer Review*⁸³, and 70 per cent of Russell Group universities were in the top fifty, with an average employer review score for Russell Group universities of 94.6 (compared to an average of 74.7 for the thirteen non-Russell Group UK universities in the top two hundred universities). Additionally, Russell Group universities' average career prospects score in the *Guardian* university league table for 2009 was 74 per cent, compared to an average of 60 per cent for the rest of the sector.⁸⁴

Wages in the UK" Hussain, McNally and Telhaj, 2009, Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics.

⁸³ <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/hybrid.asp?typeCode=144>. This features 19 Russell Group universities in the top 200 universities world-wide (17 in the top 100).

⁸⁴ This represents the percentage of recent graduates in graduate-level employment.

ANNEX E: Supporting teaching staff development in Russell Group universities (from Section 2)

Accreditation

A number of Russell Group universities offer accredited teaching awards for their staff, including:

- the University of Liverpool's Certificate in Professional Studies, Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education;
- the Newcastle University Teaching Award and Certificate in Advance Studies in Academic Practice;
- the University of Oxford's Postgraduate Diplomas in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education;
- the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching at Queen's University Belfast

Staff Development

A variety of development opportunities for staff with teaching responsibilities exist in Russell Group universities. General training courses for staff include:

- the University of Bristol's "Teaching and Learning in Higher Education" course;
- the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne's introductory course to teaching and learning in higher education;
- the University of Oxford's "Preparing for Learning and Teaching" and "Developing Learning and Teaching courses";

Several Russell Group universities have dedicated staff support programmes or units to support development, including:

- the University of Cambridge's Staff Development Programme;
- the University of Glasgow's Learning and Teaching Centre;
- the University of Nottingham's Institute for Research into Learning and Teaching in Higher Education and the Staff and Educational Development Unit;
- University College London's Centre for Advancement of Learning and Teaching.

Some Russell Group universities also offer awards for excellence in teaching. For example, the Warwick Awards for Teaching Excellence (WATE) are awarded at the university's degree congregation to excellent teachers, with a special award for early career teachers. The awards are judged by a joint staff-student panel, and student nominations are specifically invited.

Postgraduate / Postdoctoral research staff

Additionally, a number of Russell Group universities have developed specific development or training programmes for their postgraduate or postdoctoral research staff. These include:

- The University of Birmingham's module in learning and teaching for postgraduate students or in teaching skills for research staff;
- Imperial College London's research skills development course or scheme to provide teaching opportunities for postdoctoral research staff;
- specific training provided by the University of Liverpool for postgraduate research students who have teaching responsibilities;
- the University of Warwick's introduction to academic practice specifically for pre- and post-doctoral students.

Academic Practice

- Russell Group universities are keen to ensure the dissemination of good academic practice and offer courses such as the University of Birmingham's "Mentoring for Academics" course or the University of Oxford's "Developing Academic Practice" course.
- Reflecting the importance placed on enquiry-based learning in Russell Group universities, a number of institutions offer specific staff training courses on this issue, including the University of Birmingham's "Independent Learning in a Research-intensive Environment" and "Problem and Enquiry-based Learning" courses
- The University of Oxford Learning Institute hosts the HEFCE-funded Centre for Excellence in Preparing for Academic Practice, which supports postgraduate research students and postdoctoral researchers who wish to develop academic careers, focusing on three essential elements of academic practice: inquiry through research and scholarship; teaching (in particular developing support for postgraduate research students and contract research staff who wish to teach); and service to the profession, institution and academic community. The Centre conducts and promotes research into academic practice and disseminates best practice throughout the University and the broader higher education community. The University has also convened a Preparation for Academic Practice Network with six other research-intensive institutions: the University of Cambridge, the London School of Economics, Imperial College London, King's College London, the University of Edinburgh and the University of Warwick.

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