

# RUSSELL GROUP

## Education: Delivering skills for growth

Highly-skilled graduates will be the engine of our growing economy; forming the bedrock of a resilient workforce, fuelling our R&D and industrial strategy ambitions, educating the next generation and driving NHS productivity

Over the coming years, a highly-skilled workforce will be crucial to boost productivity and tackle some of society's biggest challenges such as delivering a net zero economy, maximising the potential of artificial intelligence and data and supporting an ageing population.

Russell Group universities deliver high-quality education across a range of disciplines and via vocational and academic routes. **Central to our universities' higher education offer is a commitment to delivering successful outcomes for all students, from all backgrounds**; this means increasing opportunities to access higher education and supporting students to succeed during and after their studies.

There are 750,000 students studying at Russell Group universities, over 63,500 of which are on postgraduate research courses. This represents nearly 60% of all postgraduate research students studying at universities in the UK. **These students are contributing to UK R&D success and forming the pipeline of talent that will be critical to deliver the government's Industrial Strategy.**



82% in highly skilled employment



84% satisfied with the teaching on their course



100% with Gold or Silver TEF ratings

Our universities work with regional partners including FE colleges, schools, industry and local governments to provide the skilled workforce needed in their communities and our universities will work toward deepening these regional partnerships. There is also a need to ensure our education offer addresses national skills gaps and **we look forward to working with the government, Skills England, and counterparts in the devolved administrations to ensure our provision is delivering the skilled graduates needed for our future economy.**

## Delivering quality courses

**Russell Group universities have a strong record of providing high-quality education and experience across a range of vocational and academic pathways.** All young and adult learners should have the best chance to thrive in a rapidly-changing world, and our diverse learning environments encourage students to work independently, develop robust critical thinking skills, and apply their learning to real-world challenges.

The **University of Edinburgh** provides the opportunity for students to work with community partners to tackle real-life challenges and make a social impact during their time at university through their [Students as Change Agents](#) programme. Since 2019, the programme has seen around 1,200 students engage with 31 organisations from the non-profit, public and private sector and empowered them to address 13 of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

**Our universities are committed to delivering successful outcomes for all learners, from all backgrounds.** We ensure our students have a high-quality student experience, with diverse opportunities that include re-training and upskilling, and are supported to succeed during their studies and beyond.

- In 2024, 81% of Russell Group graduates were in full-time employment and/or further study 15 months after graduation.<sup>1</sup>
- 82% of those in employment reported they were in highly skilled jobs.<sup>2</sup>
- 84% of students who responded to the National Student Survey were positive about the quality of teaching on their course.<sup>3</sup>
- Students who are eligible for free school meals at English Russell Group universities have better progression rates to skilled employment or further study than all graduates at other universities.<sup>4</sup>
- 81% of part-time students at Russell Group universities choose to continue with their course beyond the first year of study.<sup>5</sup>

The Office for Students (OfS) measures quality against three core metrics: progression, completion and continuation.<sup>6</sup> All our universities in England comfortably exceed the minimum quality thresholds the OfS has set for these measures and take enhancement of education seriously. For full-time, first degree students, English Russell Group universities have an average:

- progression rate of 78% (the OfS quality threshold is 60%)
- completion rate of 95% (threshold is 75%)
- continuation rate of 95% (threshold is 80%).

Beyond quality assurance by regulators and professional standards bodies, our universities have **robust internal assurance processes that are crucial to safeguard public confidence in academic standards and the quality of teaching and research.** This includes external examiners, ongoing programme evaluation and student surveys, and internal validation of new programmes by academics and industry specialists.

## High-level skills for local, regional and national growth

Over the coming years, a workforce with high-level skills will be needed to boost productivity<sup>7</sup> and **the UK's most powerful asset to address UK and global challenges is talent, which is why the delivery of undergraduate and postgraduate skills is so important.**

Employees with high-level skills are valued by businesses for their specialist knowledge, research skills, and problem-solving abilities. Research conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research indicates that growth in high skills jobs will offset many jobs displaced by the adoption of automation and AI in the workplace.<sup>8</sup> **Almost all of the 2.5 million new net jobs created in the UK by 2035 (96%) will be in graduate professional and associate professional roles.**<sup>9</sup> Increasing opportunity to access higher-level skills training will set students on a path to a great career, while delivering the specialist skills needed to boost the UK workforce.

**High-level skills training should be accessible to learners throughout their lifetime so that individuals remain competitive in an evolving workforce.** Through their centres for lifelong learning our universities deliver part-time and short courses that promote personal and professional growth for adult learners.<sup>10</sup> We welcome the opportunity to work with government to ensure lifelong learning is accessible to all and will drive economic growth and address societal challenges.

There are 750,000 students studying at Russell Group universities, over 63,500 of which are on postgraduate research courses. This represents nearly 60% of all postgraduate research students studying at universities in the UK. Many of our PhD students are supported through partnerships with industry. **Postgraduate research students are contributing to UK R&D success and forming the pipeline of talent that will be critical to deliver the government's Industrial Strategy.**

**Imperial** is working in collaboration with [Sainsbury's](#) to reach NET Zero operational emissions by 2035. This partnership has supported PhD and MSc students as they apply their research skills to develop innovative business models, embedding sustainability in buildings operations, transport systems and supply chains.

National and local skills needs can, and should, have an impact on what a university teaches, and our universities are striving to ensure their education offer is fit for the future. Working in close collaboration with business, our universities deliver programmes that strengthen the higher-level education and training that employers and public services need.

**Delivering local skills needs collaboration between higher education and further education (FE), with the two fulfilling complementary roles in the education system.** Our universities work closely with FE colleges to develop programmes, increase access to higher education and deliver education that plugs local skills gaps.

The **University of Exeter** is a partner in the [Strategic Employer Engagement in Devon \(SEED\)](#), a collaboration which works with SMEs and local colleges to develop a demand-led system to address skills needs of employers. Through the SEED, employers and providers can take part in workshops to shape new skills provision, analyse training needs and identify skills gaps.

The **University of Sheffield** AMRC Training Centre, is part of [a partnership of organisations](#) including DN Colleges Group, The Sheffield College and Barnsley College which aims to transform lives through learning, education and skills. The partnership links with 7,500 employers to train and boost the skills of more than 66,000 learners in South Yorkshire driving growth and productivity of the current and future workforce.

Degree apprenticeships provide high-quality vocational and academic education, ensuring students leave with the skills and experience valued by employers. 17 Russell Group universities offer apprenticeships, and apprentices make up around ten percent of their undergraduate entrants each year.<sup>11</sup> **These courses are developed through partnerships with more than 500 local and national employers**, providing opportunities to people at all career stages.

Degree apprenticeships can play a key role in updating and uplifting skills to meet the mounting challenges of public sector service delivery. Five of the top ten most popular degree apprenticeships are for public sector occupations, including registered nurse, clinical practitioner and social worker.<sup>12</sup> In England, 61% of senior leader apprentices work in the public sector, notably in the NHS.<sup>13</sup> **Through these courses, senior leaders will be developing the skills needed to transform our public services to deliver efficiencies and increase productivity.**

In September 2024, **Queen Mary University London** will enrol its 1,000<sup>th</sup> apprentice. The university has three [undergraduate-level apprenticeships](#) and three postgraduate-level apprenticeships, with 43% of apprentices from ethnic minority groups. QMUL also transferred some of its apprenticeship levy funding to Bright Young Futures, a Redbridge charity supporting young care leavers to support six apprenticeships for staff working with these young people.

## Teacher training

By training expert, creative and resilient teachers for classrooms across the UK, **university-based teacher training will play an important role in the government's ambitions to increase the number of school teachers in the UK.** 15 Russell Group universities deliver teacher training in England – collectively training more than 3,000, or 14%, of new secondary teachers every year and a higher proportion of subject specialists: 18% of all biology teachers, 23% of all physics teachers, and 26% of modern foreign language teachers.<sup>14</sup>

Courses are primarily delivered at postgraduate level, with a PGCE in primary or secondary education allowing students to build on their undergraduate degree and develop subject specialist knowledge whilst getting hands-on classroom experience. **Being taught by subject experts and encouraged to engage critically with research, our graduates can embed the latest methods into their practice throughout their careers.** Training in a diverse and academically-challenging environment also develops our graduate teachers' confidence and resilience, giving them the best chance of a long and fulfilling career in teaching.

In 2023, the **University of Manchester** saw a 13% increase in recruitment onto its PGCE courses, with primary education and Maths being the most popular specialisms. The university has an outstanding Ofsted rating, working with educational establishments across Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Cheshire to deliver school-based learning.

Like all Russell Group universities working in this space, [Manchester's Institute for Education](#) is committed to addressing key national issues within the education sector. Generative AI and other new technologies have the potential to increase teacher productivity; to reap these benefits, trainee teachers are supported to integrate AI into their teaching practice in appropriate ways.

## Healthcare training

**Russell Group universities represent nearly half the medical schools in the UK, training 4 out of 5 doctors and dentists, and around 18,000 nurses and midwives each year.** A further 40,000 students are enrolled on courses to become healthcare technicians, pharmacists, pathologists, and other professions in allied health subjects. As trainee practitioners, these students are also helping deliver healthcare services to their communities.

Since 2012, **Cardiff University** has provided high-quality practical training for final year dentistry students at its state-of-the-art [Primary Care Dental Unit in the Cynon Valley](#). This Unit also serves its local community by providing a wide range of free dental care services to an area of south Wales in which an estimated 10,000 individuals have no other access to a dentist.

Our universities are working with FE college and school partners to **increase access to their healthcare courses from students from under-represented backgrounds** and ensure these students thrive during their students and into their careers.

The **University of Liverpool**, in collaboration with local FE partners, has developed a Year Zero foundation programme for UK students to widen access to a variety of their vocational health studies programmes, including dentistry, medicine, nursing, and veterinary science. The [School of Medicine](#) also supports the regional delivery of the Medical Schools Council Summer Schools and their Teacher and Advisor Conferences.

In addition, the university delivers the [Merseyside Young Health and Life Scientists](#), a programme designed to prepare students in Years 9-11 to make informed choices about their education and career pathways, supporting them to achieve their aspirations.

As key partners for the NHS, our universities will play a critical role in securing a pipeline of home-grown talent for the UK's health and social care workforce. **A new medical training taskforce would bring universities, NHS trusts, relevant professional bodies and local and central government together in workforce planning and implementation to ensure a strategic, collaborative and coordinated approach.**

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<sup>1</sup> [HESA Graduate Outcomes Survey](#) (2024)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> [National Student Survey data](#) (2023)

<sup>4</sup> [Office for Students B3](#) (2023). The progression rate for full-time undergraduate students at English Russell Group universities who are eligible for free school meals is 74.1%. The progression rate for full-time undergraduate students at other English HEIs is 64.0% for those who are eligible for free school meals and 69.9% for those who are not eligible for free school meals.

<sup>5</sup> [Office for Students Student Outcomes Data](#) (2023)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> [Skills and UK productivity](#), page 44, DfE (2023)

<sup>8</sup> [The Skills Imperative 2035: Occupational Outlook – Long-run employment prospects for the UK](#) (2022)

<sup>9</sup> [Labour market and skills projections: 2020 to 2035](#), DfE (2023)

<sup>10</sup> [HESA data on Continuing Professional Development and Continuing Education](#) (2024)

<sup>11</sup> [Office for Students Size and Shape data](#) (2023)

<sup>12</sup> [Options for the Future of the Apprenticeship Levy or New Growth and Skills Levy](#), UVAC (2024)

<sup>13</sup> [The critical contribution of Level 6/7 Management Apprenticeships](#), UVAC (2023)

<sup>14</sup> [Initial Teacher Training Census](#) (2023)