

## Russell Group briefing on the Higher Education and Research Bill House of Commons – Consideration of Amendments, March 2017

### Overview

*Russell Group universities deliver outstanding research hand in hand with excellent teaching – and this is central to the student experience they provide. We welcome the Government's willingness to consider and propose amendments to the Higher Education and Research Bill that will strengthen the UK's world-class higher education system.*

*In particular, we welcome a number of Government amendments to the legislation introduced in the House of Lords which will help to maintain the institutional autonomy of HE providers, to secure the independence of the allocation of research funds (through application of the Haldane Principle), and to ensure joint working between the Office for Students (OfS) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).*

*We note a number of opposition amendments introduced in the Lords. We would welcome further reassurances about the rights of overseas students and staff in order to safeguard the UK's position as a world leader in science, research and HE for the long-term. Increasing undergraduate tuition fee caps by inflation is also critically important in ensuring the quality of undergraduate education can be maintained.*

### About Us

The Russell Group represents 24 leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience and unrivalled links with business and the public sector.

University of Birmingham  
University of Bristol  
University of Cambridge  
Cardiff University  
Durham University  
University of Edinburgh  
University of Exeter  
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  
University of Oxford  
Queen Mary University of London  
Queen's University Belfast  
University of Sheffield  
University of Southampton  
University College London  
University of Warwick  
University of York

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## Russell Group position on amendments introduced in the House of Lords

### *Progress to date*

1. We welcome the movement the Government has made on a number of issues in response to recommendations and concerns raised by the Russell Group and other stakeholders as the Bill has progressed through parliament. In particular, enshrining institutional autonomy and the Haldane Principle in legislation for the first time reflects a strong commitment from Government to protecting these essential features of our world-class universities and research system.
2. Whilst we would still like to see further scrutiny and safeguards included in the process by which University Title could be revoked, we recognise that the Bill has been strengthened since its initial drafting to ensure specific conditions would need to be met before the OfS could revoke a provider's Degree Awarding Powers or University Title, and that the powers in the Bill may not be used to revoke a HE provider's Royal Charter in full.
3. Similarly, we welcome the amendments which require both UKRI and the OfS to report on cooperation with each other and ensure that UKRI's views must inform advice to the OfS on the grant, variation or revocation of Research Degree Awarding Powers (DAPs). However, we would encourage Ministers to go further and look again at ensuring that decisions to award or revoke research DAPs are taken jointly by the OfS and UKRI.

### *Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)*

4. We share the Government's ambition to put students at the heart of the HE system - this accords with our universities' commitment to delivering excellent teaching and an outstanding student experience. We have welcomed the Government's willingness to work collaboratively with universities to shape the TEF.
5. The development of a robust TEF that is truly reflective of the UK's excellent higher education system will take time. The Government's commitment to a comprehensive "lessons learned" exercise following the trial year, and to an extended pilot period for considering options for a potential subject-level TEF, is therefore welcome.
6. **The Government has made a link between TEF and tuition fee caps at undergraduate level and it is important that these fee caps should be able to rise with inflation.**
7. The effect of inflation on the tuition fee cap risks compromising the quality of undergraduate education in the long run. The Government has recognised this and has already agreed that tuition fees should be able to rise in line with inflation for 2017-18 (for institutions with an appropriate quality assessment). We would now like to see this confirmed for future years to help ensure students' expectations of a world-class learning experience can continue to be met, and exceeded. Any delay in introducing a longer-term increase in fee caps could affect the sustainability of high quality teaching at UK universities.

### *Overseas students and staff*

8. A strong base of overseas talent, including academics, researchers and students, is fundamental in underpinning the UK's excellence in research, innovation and education. Continued access to an international talent base will be essential for the UK in maintaining and developing our position as a world-leading research nation and will play a critical role in educating future generations. This in turn will help to drive economic growth and productivity, and contribute to progress on industrial strategy goals, particularly in a more challenging environment post-Brexit.
9. Excellent overseas students are indispensable for world-class universities, contributing to a diverse student body and a thriving society, culture and economy – not just on campus but for the UK more widely. We welcome reassurances the Government has been able to give so far on the rights of EU

national, including students, to remain in the UK; however, further reassurances are needed to safeguard the UK's position as a world leader in science, research and HE for the long-term.

10. **We welcome the Government's recognition of the important contribution made by overseas students and academics to the UK's world-class universities and the country as a whole, and in particular, the stated intention to continue to attract international talent in future.<sup>1</sup>**
11. **We therefore support amendment 150 introduced in the House of Lords which aligns with the Government's intentions to clarify the rights of EU nationals as an urgent priority.** We believe the amendment would help promote international collaboration, and reiterate that the UK will continue to welcome genuine international students. The removal of students from net migration figures would send a clear message about the UK's openness to talented students from around the world.

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<sup>1</sup> See the Government's Brexit White Paper: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-united-kingdoms-exit-from-and-new-partnership-with-the-european-union-white-paper> and the Green Paper on a Modern Industrial Strategy: [https://beisgovuk.citizenspace.com/strategy/industrial-strategy/supporting\\_documents/buildingourindustrialstrategygreenpaper.pdf](https://beisgovuk.citizenspace.com/strategy/industrial-strategy/supporting_documents/buildingourindustrialstrategygreenpaper.pdf)