

The value of international students at Russell Group universities

1. Summary

Overseas students are indispensable for world-class universities. They contribute to a diverse student body and a thriving society, culture and economy – on campus, in local regions and across the whole UK.

There are 200,000 students from outside the UK at Russell Group universities, making up 34% of all students. International students are more highly represented on postgraduate research courses and in disciplines that are of strategic importance to the UK, including many STEM subjects.

International students play a key role in promoting the future sustainability of UK universities and contribute hugely to the UK economy: we estimate that international students at Russell Group universities generate around £10 billion per annum for the UK.

The majority of the public want the same number, or more, international students in the UK¹. To position the UK as a dynamic and outward looking nation, Government should continue to welcome overseas students to our universities and recognise the value they bring.

Any future immigration system must support the UK's universities to attract international students from anywhere in the world.

2. Benefits international students bring to the UK and our universities

International students bring a wide range of economic, trade, cultural and social benefits to the UK:

- **Higher education is one of the UK's most successful export industries.**² In 2014-15, on- and off-campus spending by international students and their visitors generated £25.8 billion in gross output for the UK economy. This spending supported over 200,000 jobs across the UK.
- **International students play a key role in promoting the future sustainability of UK universities** and support the continued provision of subjects which are of strategic importance to the UK economy: 51% of students studying computer science at Russell Group universities are from overseas.
- **They bring a wide range of social and cultural benefits to the UK and our universities**, which advantage domestic students, enriching the research and learning environment and helping home students develop internationally-relevant skills.
- **Overseas students also bring wider economic benefits by boosting trade and R&D links.** The 'soft power' benefits for the UK as international graduates return home and become ambassadors for the UK and our HE system are considerable, strengthening links abroad to the benefit of the UK.
- **Overseas researchers and PhD students play a vital role in continually refreshing the UK's research base**, and in developing our position as a world-leading research nation.

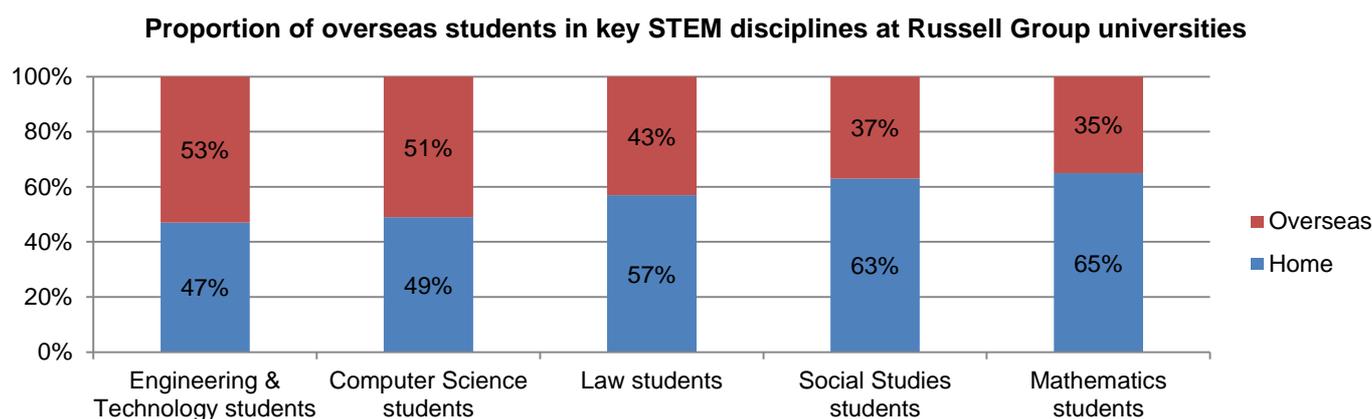
¹ Universities UK International Students Poll, ComRes, 2016

² In 2013, BIS calculated that education is the fifth largest services export sector in the UK, ahead of both insurance services and computer and information services.

3. Our international students in numbers

There are 200,000 international students (non-UK EU and non-EU nationals) at Russell Group universities. They make up: 34% of all students; 24% of undergraduates and 54% of postgraduates; helping to ensure a diverse student body and enriching the overall student experience.

International students are more highly represented on courses that are of strategic importance to the UK, including many STEM subjects such as engineering and technology and computer science. In this way overseas students help ensure the long-term sustainability of courses in higher-cost disciplines, enabling home students to continue to access these courses. This is particularly important for postgraduate research courses in key disciplines at Russell Group universities, where international students are highly represented.³



More broadly, international students play a key role in promoting the future sustainability of UK universities, not just the viability of certain courses. The financial projections for fees paid by international students to 2018/19 are equivalent to 15% of total income.

We estimate that international students at Russell Group universities generate around £10 billion per annum for the UK.⁴ Russell Group universities are located in every region and all four nations of the UK and their international students make a considerable contribution to their local economies: international students at the University of Sheffield alone provide a net benefit of £120 million to the local economy every year and up to £176 million to the wider region.

4. How a future immigration system can facilitate economic growth and prosperity

Any future immigration system must support the UK's universities to attract overseas students from anywhere in the world as they are essential in supporting the sustainability of UK higher education for home students, and play a vital role in driving economic growth and productivity gains. The system should

- Treat students as a separate, low-risk category of migrant and fast-track their access to the UK – as many of our competitors do.
- Introduce more comprehensive post-study work opportunities for overseas students.
- Be based on robust evidence: better data on the number of international students leaving the UK at the end of their courses must be collected and published.

In addition, the Government should confirm the rights and long-term status of current and prospective EU students to work and study at UK universities. These assurances are needed to safeguard the UK's position as a world leader in science, research and HE for the long-term.

In order to position the UK as a dynamic and outward looking nation, Government should continue to welcome overseas students to our universities and recognise the value they bring.

³ For example, on PGR courses 70% of engineering and technology students are from overseas.

⁴ Estimate of on- and off-campus spending using UUK analysis based on proportion of international students at Russell Group universities (using HESA data)