

How Russell Group universities are engaging with employers to deliver skilled graduates

Summary

- Russell Group universities are engaging with local and national employers to ensure students develop the core skills and experience they need to succeed in the workforce. This collaboration takes many forms: from pioneering new provision in higher and degree apprenticeships to working with employers to co-design course curricula and content, and ensuring all students have access to a range of work placement and internship opportunities.
- By working in collaboration with employers and with other partners in their regions, our universities are committed to addressing skills gaps across a range of industries particularly in vital areas such as science, technology and engineering. This means they can capitalise on opportunities to drive regional growth and meet employer demand now and in the future.
- Our universities are also committed to widening participation to their institutions and supporting students from less advantaged backgrounds to succeed on their degree courses and build the employability skills they will need to progress to professional employment. They are working with employers to provide alternate routes into higher education to boost social mobility and providing targeted support to help close the employability gap between disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers.

Developing and delivering Degree Apprenticeships

A number of Russell Group universities have been involved in the development and delivery of degree apprenticeships, with many taking a lead in pioneering new provision in this space. Our universities are working in collaboration with local and national employers to respond to the skills gaps identified by business in a range of areas including manufacturing, digital technologies and computer science. Many new degree apprenticeships are particularly targeted to increase participation from under-represented groups including students from less advantaged backgrounds and women in STEM disciplines. For example:

- a) Sheffield University welcomed its first cohort of 150 Advanced Apprentices in 2013 in order to address skills gaps in engineering which were limiting the ability of the region to expand its manufacturing base. By providing alternative routes into higher education, the University also seeks to boost social mobility. Drawing on the world-leading expertise within the University's Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre (AMRC) Training Centre, the University is collaborating with Sheffield Hallam University to offer new degree apprenticeships aimed at meeting the needs of employers in the Sheffield City Region and beyond for skilled engineers. From September 2017, 90 apprentices began to study for degrees in Integrated, Materials and Rail engineering as well as achieving professional accreditation alongside their employment, with the opportunity to progress to study at masters level.
- b) The Universities of Birmingham and Leeds and Queen's University Belfast are collaborating with PwC to deliver a four-year technology degree apprenticeship starting in September 2018. Graduates will gain a degree in computer science or software engineering, and the new provision forms part of the universities' commitment to address the UK's technology skills gap and drive regional growth, as well as improving the diversity of the tech industry.

- c) In addition, Leeds University has entered into a partnership with other education providers in the region (Leeds Trinity University, Bradford College and Barnsley College) and Leeds Teaching Hospitals Trust to develop a leadership and management master's degree apprenticeship. This will aim to develop the clinical and professional skills of senior managers and supervisors within the NHS Trust and is due to accept apprentices from September 2018.
- d) Queen Mary University of London has partnered with a number of organisations to develop their Digital and Technology Solutions degree apprenticeship including the BBC, Goldman Sachs, John Lewis, IBM, and GlaxoSmithKline (GSK). These programmes enable apprentices to choose among four pathways including IT consultant, Business Analyst, Data Analyst and Software Engineer.
- e) The University of Exeter also delivers a Digital and Technology Solutions degree apprenticeship with a range of partners including IBM, Met Office, Renishaw, BT, Laing O'Rourke and Airbus. The University is actively seeking to develop degree apprenticeship programmes in a range of other areas, including manufacturing, product design, renewable energy and electronics.
- f) The University of Warwick is creating 100 new degree apprenticeships each year in civil engineering and social work supported by funding from the degree apprenticeship development fund. This complements the University's existing degree apprenticeships in engineering in partnership with Jaguar Land Rover.

Embedding employability in degree courses to deliver skills for the future

Alongside pioneering new types of provision such as degree apprenticeships, Russell Group universities are also working closely with employers, external professional bodies and regulators to ensure all their graduates are equipped with the skills they need to succeed in the workforce, now and in the future. Russell Group universities deliver:

- over 2,000 first degree and integrated masters courses every year which are either partially or fully accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies
- courses with curricula which are co-designed and delivered with employers
- a range of work placements, internships and careers advice to help students develop employability skills and understanding of the workplace
- bespoke graduate, postgraduate and continued professional development (CPD) training, co-designed with employers, helping to build in-house capacity in local businesses

For example:

- a) Pioneered by Newcastle University in 2002, the Flying Start Programme offers a unique BA Honours degree in Business Accounting and Finance, jointly developed by the University, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW). The degree's unique structure enables students to put classroom theory into commercial practice on placement, and is designed to equip students with a range of business skills. To date, around 700 students have participated in the Flying Start Programme, and all graduates from this degree are now in employment or further study.
- b) In 2012, Imperial's Department of Chemical Engineering opened a £2 million carbon capture pilot plant in partnership with automation and power technologies firm ABB. Created as part of Imperial's ten year strategic alliance with ABB, the state-of-the-art facility gives undergraduates the chance to control the industrial-standard pilot plant, learn key skills such as how to start up the facility, shut it down, and operate it safely and efficiently. Thanks to this training, Imperial students graduate with unrivalled expertise, making them more employable in an increasingly competitive sector.
- c) The University of Nottingham and GlaxoSmithKline have partnered to develop Nottingham's Carbon Neutral Laboratory. The £15 million facility serves as a hub to catalyse new collaborations with industry and delivers an innovative education and training programme for young scientists of the future that will ensure that new scientists from Nottingham are "industry ready", with a thorough understanding of the sustainability and environmental impact of their work.

- d) LSE collaborates with a wide range of public and private partners to embed employability skills into curricula. The “Capstone” project, for example, is a compulsory course undertaken by all second year LSE students studying towards a masters in Public Administration (MPA) with students working in groups on real-world public policy projects. The contribution of MPA students has been highly valued by a wide range of clients including Boston Consulting Group, ARUP and the Bank of England. Capstone projects give students the chance to improve group working skills, an area that potential employers are increasingly focusing on during recruitment.
- e) The Internship Hub, the University of Glasgow’s dedicated internship platform, supports students to secure, and make the most of, quality project-based internships. The University has worked with employers to develop “exclusive” internships which maximise students’ employability skills. First established in 2002 with 20 participating companies, the Internship Hub now works with hundreds of local, national and international organisations and has successfully placed over 1,900 interns.
- f) An initiative to provide business leadership training for senior managers from fast growing SMEs was launched in 2014 by Warwick Manufacturing Group (WVG), at the University of Warwick, in partnership with Santander. The programme aims to give senior SME managers the opportunity to boost their ability to lead and embed innovation in their organisations and consists of five three-day modules delivered over the course of a year covering knowledge and skills from strategic innovation and operational efficiency, to financial and commercial awareness and marketing and reputation management. Upon successful completion of the programme, individuals receive a postgraduate award from the University of Warwick; they can also use the credits from that course as part of the path towards a full masters degree.

Enhancing social capital for students from less advantaged backgrounds

Russell Group universities invest in a wide range of student support mechanisms targeted to ensure that disadvantaged students succeed on their degree courses and build the employability skills they will need to progress to professional employment. The engagement which Russell Group institutions have with employers in this area forms a key part of their widening participation work, enabling those entering university to compete on a more level playing field for employment, irrespective of their background. For example:

- a) In March 2015, Queen Mary University of London launched QConsult, an initiative supported by J.P. Morgan which places teams of high-calibre students from low-income families into east London businesses to conduct mini consultancy projects. The initiative aims to close the employability gap between disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers by raising the confidence, social capital and employability of these students by providing them with work experience, connecting them with high-growth job sectors and giving access to mentoring.
- b) The University of Exeter’s ‘Access to Internships’ scheme allows students to secure their own paid internship, including support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to arrange their internship. Exeter have invested significant resources to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds to access work experience placements and internships, with 190 widening participation students securing an internship or placement in 2015/16.
- c) Four Russell Group universities have partnered with upReach, an organisation which improves access to professional employment for undergraduates from less-privileged backgrounds. Participants are offered a range of support working with the partner universities and employers in in areas such as consultancy, banking, audit and tax and central government. UpReach estimates that since it was founded, participating undergraduates have been five times more likely to secure a job with a partner employer than an average applicant and have secured starting salaries £3,500 more than the average graduate.