

## People and ideas: proposals for the next government

The Russell Group represents 24 leading UK universities. Through world-class research and education we are helping create a dynamic economy, stronger communities and an open, outward-facing UK. Each day our universities and others strive to serve our nation and wider world as educators, inventors, job creators, business incubators and anchors in our communities.

Above all, we believe passionately that the UK's greatest strengths are its people and their ideas. This includes the hundreds of thousands of students who will shape our shared future and the many dedicated researchers whose breakthroughs touch all our lives, whether by combatting disease, tackling climate change or preventing terrorism and crime.

To flourish, students, researchers and the entire university community need government's support. We call on any party seeking to lead this country to stand on the side of people and ideas by investing in **talent**, boosting the **knowledge economy**, building **strong global partnerships** and ensuring universities can help their **local communities thrive**.

### Investing in talent

- (a) Be ambitious for people pursuing all forms of post-18 education, recognising that a diverse mix of qualifications, providers and disciplines – including technical education as well as academic training – is essential to the country's long-term prosperity.
- (b) Ensure the university path remains open and attractive to anyone with the desire and ability to attend. Under-funding higher education restricts places and hurts students most. The next government should maintain per student funding levels, with an enduring guarantee to meet demand as the number of 18-year-olds rises dramatically in the coming years.
- (c) Help all young people realise their potential through an ambitious national strategy to tackle inequality throughout the education system, from the early years through to entering the workforce, bringing together universities, schools and colleges, parents, employers, public services, charities and local communities, government and regulators. Maintenance grants should be reintroduced for students who need them most and student loans should no longer accrue interest before graduation.
- (d) Draw on and retain overseas talent with a bold target to grow the number of international students and create a more welcoming environment, including by allowing international graduates to stay and work in the UK for at least two years after their studies.

### Boosting the knowledge economy

- (e) Invest in the breakthroughs in knowledge and innovation happening in UK universities so they can become the commercial products, services and processes that help transform our world and offer answers to issues such as global warming and the ageing population. For every £1 of public research funding, UK universities deliver an average return of £8 to the economy.

While there is cross-party agreement that investment in R&D must increase, no party has yet set out a credible plan for turning this ambition into reality. The next government should bring the UK more in line with our international competitors by investing 3% of GDP on R&D by 2030 and setting out a clear plan for how this will be achieved. A third of this should be public investment to leverage two thirds from industry and other sources.

- (f) Support the next generation of UK innovators and entrepreneurs through increasing the number of PhD students and strengthening the opportunities for those entering research careers in academia, the public sector and industry.
- (g) Keep the NHS at the cutting-edge of medical innovation, including by giving real-terms protection to the National Institute for Health Research's (NIHR) budget. The NIHR is the UK's largest funder of health and care research, dedicated to solving our biggest medical challenges.
- (h) Enable the UK to attract the best minds from around the world with a secure and streamlined immigration system which reduces bureaucracy, cost and burden on applicants, sponsors and the Home Office. This should build on the system of digital, individual accounts developed for the EU Settlement Scheme. The expectations on sponsors should be reasonable and workable with regular review of how red tape can be minimised. Salary thresholds should not prevent the recruitment of skilled staff and, if retained, should be calculated pro-rata to avoid discriminating against part-time workers, who are predominantly women. A Global Talent Visa should be designed to enable universities to recruit all staff essential to their research, including specialist technicians.

### **Building strong global partnerships**

- (i) Ensure that, whatever the Brexit outcome, the UK secures the closest possible relationship with our EU neighbours on science, innovation and education, building on decades of successful research partnerships and academic exchanges. This includes full association to Horizon Europe and the next Erasmus programme, as well as sensible and attractive arrangements for the mobility of students and researchers.
- (j) Recognise the central place of education and research in strengthening the UK's international relations and soft power. Broad and ambitious objectives in both areas should automatically be considered for inclusion within any future free trade deals, which could pave the way for more detailed bilateral agreements.
- (k) Help revolutionise the way in which the UK collaborates with other leading research nations around the world. By leveraging our unique strengths and capabilities, government can help maximise the opportunities for joining forces in new and innovative global research collaborations.

### **Creating thriving communities**

- (l) Understand and supporting the civic contribution of UK universities, which create jobs, drive regeneration, boost local businesses and serve as cultural hubs for their communities.
- (m) Recognise that UK higher education is made up of a rich mix of institutions with varied histories, traditions and links to their local areas. Just as great communities are different, so are great universities. One size never fits all and intelligent regulation paired with institutional freedom is fundamental to the sector's success.