

Working with the world's best: responsible international recruitment and research collaborations

The Russell Group represents 24 leading research-intensive universities across the UK. Our universities epitomise Global Britain: attracting skilled international students and researchers, overseas investment, and working with global partners to tackle pressing research challenges like net zero. International collaboration and overseas recruitment are conducted responsibly, with close sector-government partnership to protect national security and academic freedom.

We look forward to continuing our positive relationship with the Home Office to deliver the benefits of the new points-based immigration system and ensure a proportionate legislative response to national security risks, including through the National Security Bill.

International students in the UK

The new post study work visa has reinforced the UK's reputation as one of the best places to study, with over 600,000 international students now choosing the UK. **International students bring a range of benefits to regions across the UK**, spending in towns and cities across the country to boost local economies, establishing new international trade links, and adding to skilled regional workforces. Interactions with international students confer soft power advantages to the UK for decades to come, supporting a central aim of the Integrated Review.

Overseas students are also integral to university teaching and research. Studying alongside domestic students, they bring specialist skillsets and diverse perspectives to our classrooms and labs. International tuition fee income is used to mitigate some of the deficits in UK public funding for teaching and research, enabling universities to increase numbers of domestic undergraduates each year, especially in higher cost STEM subjects, and advance cutting-edge R&I in areas of national and local interest.

We want to be able to attract the brightest students from all over the world and our universities are proactively seeking opportunities to establish new markets in growth countries such as India, which can be aided by new trade agreements. Universities are also setting up recruitment offices overseas and utilising the new graduate visa to target growing markets such as Nigeria and Saudi Arabia.

Key stats: international students in the UK

- The DfE estimate UK education exports were worth £25bn in 2019, with 70% of revenues from the Higher Education sector.
- International student off-campus spending is worth at least £2.4bn annually.
- In the last 5 years, Russell Group universities have proactively increased the number of students from India (+68%), Saudi Arabia (+58%) and the UAE (+108%).
- We continue to grow places for domestic students, with UK 18-year-old acceptances up 28.2% between 2019 and 2021 at higher tariff universities.

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

World-leading research teams

The World Intellectual Property Office ranks the UK 1st globally for the quality of scientific outputs and 2nd for the quality of universities. The UK's world-leading research sector is underpinned by a mix of domestic and international talent, with 30% of staff at Russell Group universities recruited from overseas.

Government's new points-based immigration system has helped accelerate the recruitment of the best research staff from across the globe. For example, extra points for those with PhDs has made the UK more attractive for skilled technicians, while the new Global Talent visa brings in world-leading researchers. We look forward to working with Government to build on positive reforms and maintain the UK's competitive edge in the international market for research talent. This could include a benchmarking exercise, comparing UK visa costs for researchers with our competitors to ensure we have an edge in the market for top global talent. For example, the health surcharge alone exceeds £10,000 upfront for a family of four applying for a five-year visa.

Secure international research collaborations

International research collaborations allow us to achieve more collectively than we can alone, bringing together people, ideas and expertise to tackle pressing global challenges such as climate change. Any international activity carries risks, but universities take their responsibilities to protect national security seriously, and continue to work with Government to address emerging issues.

UK universities are now safeguarded by a robust legislative and regulatory landscape, which has been strengthened in the last two years to include:

- The new National Security and Investment Act, requiring investors to obtain Government approval when investing in university spinouts operating in sensitive areas, and allowing Government to 'call-in' research partnerships that threaten UK national security
- Enhanced export control regulations
- An expanded ATAS, the pre-visa vetting service that requires international researchers and students to receive FCDO clearance where they intend to work or study in a sensitive subject area
- Close collaboration between the higher education sector, Government and technical agencies, which has led to co-produced guidance for universities and academics to identify and mitigate risks posed by hostile actors; and BEIS's new Research Collaboration Advice Team, a single point of contact for the sector to discuss risks associated with their international activities
- Additionally, as part of the Higher Education Freedom of Speech Bill, Government is likely to require universities to disclose international income above a certain financial threshold.

UK universities also share intelligence and best-practice with domestic and international peers. This has led to enhanced due diligence processes, new mandatory training for staff and students, innovative awareness campaigns, and other internal processes which can help identify and mitigate threats posed by hostile actors. **We will continue to work with Government and the technical agencies to protect our staff, students and UK national security.**

UK Foreign Influence Registration Scheme (FIRS)

The Home Office has committed to introducing a new UK FIRS, which will enhance transparency of international influence. We believe the new scheme should complement the existing legislative and regulatory architecture and avoid introducing duplicative and bureaucratic requirements which could inadvertently place the UK at a disadvantage to its competitors. We want to work with Government to ensure a **UK FIRS replicates equivalent schemes in the US and Australia and avoids capturing research activities which are covered by existing compliance measures.**