


**RUSSELL  
GROUP**

A **BRIGHT**  
FUTURE

A Russell Group  
manifesto for the UK



**OUR VISION IS FOR A HEALTHY,  
GREEN AND MORE RESILIENT  
UNITED KINGDOM, WITH A  
THRIVING INNOVATION-DRIVEN  
ECONOMY AND COLLABORATIVE  
APPROACHES BEING TAKEN TO  
TACKLE MAJOR CHALLENGES  
FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL.**

To deliver this, the UK will need a renewed focus on high-level skills, the ability to harness new technologies effectively, and the best research to advance health care, tackle climate change and rejuvenate business. Our world-class universities are already working hard to make this vision a reality: they aren't just a core asset for the UK, they are delivering real and sustained impact right across the country and are keen to do even more.









## **We call on the next Government to be ambitious in harnessing and strengthening UK universities – helping us to address inequalities, create opportunities to advance knowledge and to innovate – and celebrating the success of UK science, humanities and arts to create a bright future for everyone.**

Whichever party leads the next UK Government will have the opportunity to take decisions that can build prosperity, support families, reduce inequality and secure a leadership position on the world stage.

But we recognise finances will be stretched. Individuals will also want to see the Government prioritise changes that help them in tangible ways, especially in the short term.

The country's leading universities and the students they educate will be a key resource the next Government can rely on as it looks to 2030 and beyond.

UK universities educate over two million students a year giving people in communities across the country the opportunity, skills and experience to succeed. We attract talented individuals from around the world to enhance the education we offer and the research we do. As a sector, UK universities are the best in Europe and second only to the US globally. We generate more exports for the UK economy than the pharmaceutical sector, create hundreds of new and successful spin-out companies every year, and directly employ over a quarter of a million people, with tens of thousands more in high value jobs linked to our universities throughout the country.

Investment in top quality research is delivering breakthroughs and ideas that are helping the UK take the lead in tackling cancer, protecting the environment, and paving the way to reach Net Zero with a clean-tech revolution. But this cannot be taken for granted, especially in a world dominated by three leading research powerhouses: the US, EU and China. Matching the ambition

being shown by our international competitors with long-term research investment commitments will strengthen the UK's economy and resilience.

Technologies such as robotics and AI have the potential to boost UK productivity and transform the world of work, but we will need new skills to get the most out of them. By delivering forward-looking, high-quality, education, our universities are equipping individuals for jobs now and for the decades to come.

We have forged strong partnerships with business, charities and public sector bodies, contributing to the UK's superb global reputation for research excellence, and turning new ideas into positive economic, societal, and environmental impacts. Through our civic roles, local leadership and convening power, we are working hard to make sure the benefits of our research-intensive universities are realised in all of our communities and across the country.

We are proud that the UK continues to punch above its weight, and we want this to continue so both the UK and the world can benefit. A 2030 vision for research and skills would see ambitious investment to give the UK an economic edge in the industries and technologies of the future, help address critical health and social challenges, and keep us safe by delivering a strategic advantage through strong international partnerships and a robust skills pipeline.

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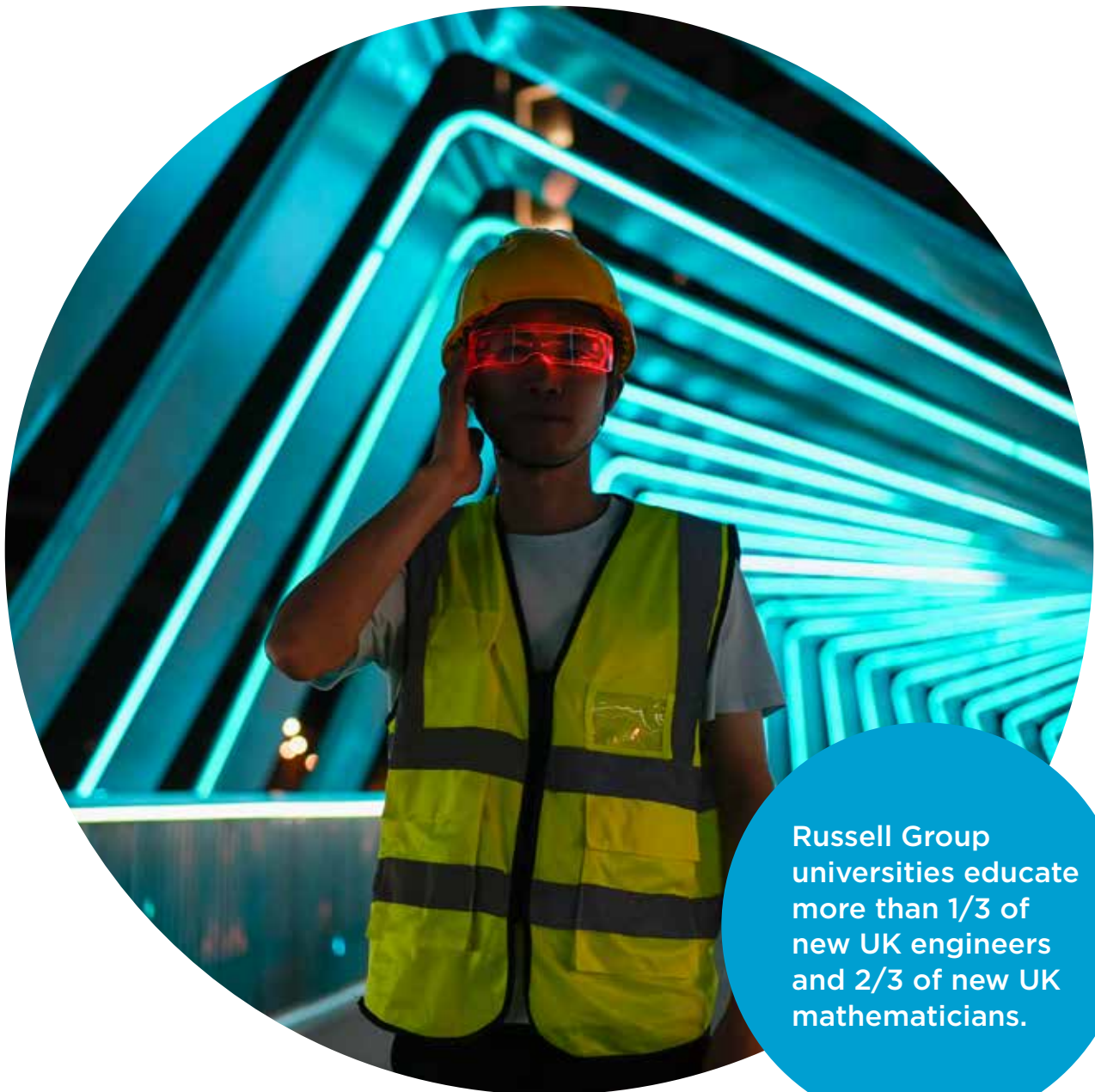
**The opportunity for a bright future is there to grasp, and we will work with the next Government to make sure it can be delivered.**

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# DELIVERING SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE AND A BETTER DEAL FOR STUDENTS

From emerging sectors like engineering biology, to those undergoing transformation such as construction, financial services, and the creative industries – and across all our public services – the UK needs a rich mix of skilled graduates, postgraduates and apprentices to build the workforce of the future.

This isn't just critical for productivity and sustainable economic growth but for social cohesion and national wellbeing.



Russell Group universities educate more than 1/3 of new UK engineers and 2/3 of new UK mathematicians.

## Futureproofing UK skills

Russell Group universities have a proven record of offering high-quality education across a range of technical, vocational, and academic disciplines, with teaching from world-leading experts in their fields.

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**We teach 80% of future doctors and dentists in the country, more than 1/3 of all engineers and 2/3 of mathematicians. Our staff work hard to ensure 95% of students complete their studies successfully, and 84% of our working graduates are in highly skilled jobs 15 months after graduation.**

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Most of our members already offer high-quality degree apprenticeships in a range of fields alongside free and short courses to help people retrain, upskill or further their careers. With the right support, including a simplified regulatory system, we could build our degree-level apprenticeships and CPD offers alongside other programmes.

However, it is becoming much harder for universities to deliver the same quality and quantity of education and research activity as the value of funding decreases sharply in real terms. Further Education colleges, many of which we partner with locally, face the same pressures but from an even lower funding base.

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**By 2030, we estimate there will be a £5,000 funding gap per UK student per year between the average cost of teaching UK undergraduates in England and the amount universities receive in tuition fee income and Government grants.**

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In Wales, Scotland and especially Northern Ireland, the funds available are even more restricted. This is a serious threat to the future skills we need across the country. It will force universities to make tough decisions that may negatively impact course choice, student numbers, and their globally recognised science and innovation activities.

To ensure we can invest in high-quality teaching and support for students, a more sustainable approach to funding Higher and

Further Education is needed: one which is fair and affordable for students and the taxpayer and protects the pipeline of skills and innovation talent required for UK prosperity.

**We will continue to play our part in looking to drive down costs and be more efficient, but the funding available to universities and colleges – the unit of resource per student – must start to increase to reflect inflation so we can protect the quality of education and deliver outstanding and work-ready graduates.**

## Supporting students to succeed

There is still a huge amount of health, wealth and educational inequality in the UK. The recent Covid-19 pandemic has only added to those challenges. We want everyone who has the potential to succeed at college or university to have a chance to study and realise their potential, irrespective of background or circumstances. This includes those who may want or need to retrain later in life.

This is why we work across the education system to break down barriers to university study, partnering with schools and Further Education colleges – in several cases directly sponsoring or setting up schools. We will continue to prioritise this work, supporting disadvantaged groups and communities and working with local and national employers to develop lifelong and flexible learning programmes.

Our universities also invest millions in schemes to provide hardship funding, mental health, and other support services to help students succeed during their studies. This includes partnering with NHS trusts to close gaps in services so that young people get the help they need.

To complement this work, the next Government should do three things to ease the growing financial pressure on students: **uplift maintenance loans so they reflect actual average inflation each year, reintroduce maintenance grants for the most disadvantaged students, and review the parental earnings threshold (frozen since 2008) which affects the maximum amount of maintenance loan individual students can receive.**

# A THRIVING UK ECONOMY

As economic and cultural powerhouses, Russell Group universities support businesses, help create thousands of skilled jobs across the UK and strengthen their communities. Over 90% of research at Russell Group universities is world-leading or internationally excellent. Millions of people visit our campuses every year. Our students, staff and researchers work extensively with businesses, schools and colleges, charities, arts, sport and public sector bodies, and we use our convening power to bring partnerships together that deliver real economic, cultural and societal impact.

Our expertise in cutting edge research, and investment in new facilities and innovation, is transforming UK cities and creating thriving clusters of high-value activity. We are giving researchers and businesses access to technologies that can transform everything from the way we discover new medicines to how we travel, work and protect the environment.

## Research for skilled jobs and economic growth

Russell Group universities are genuine world leaders across a broad range of research disciplines, and our graduates and postgraduates are the driving force helping to take the latest advances into business and other settings. We need to sustain this momentum as our future economy will depend heavily on innovative ideas and talent.

Stable, long-term investment in UK R&D delivered the Covid-19 vaccine, has given us more quantum start-ups than any other country in Europe, has helped keep our insurance and financial sectors competitive and has ensured the UK remains a leading centre for both advanced manufacturing and the advanced pharmaceutical industry. We are also seeing significant business growth in creative industries, able to draw on the wealth of research and expertise we have in technology, the arts, humanities and social sciences.

Secure public funding for research gives the UK the best possible opportunity to bring in additional investment from global businesses looking to tap into new and emerging technologies, our knowledge base and creativity – in turn, bringing high value job opportunities to every corner of the UK. One of the biggest advantages we have over our competitors is the way universities can use excellence-based block grant funding to invest strategically, build industry partnerships, train the next generation of talent and develop exciting new areas of research before other funding routes become available.

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**Research and innovation activity at Russell Group universities alone is worth tens of billions a year – equivalent to three times the trade boost of the 2012 Olympics. But we want to, and can do, even more.**

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Investing in the research talent pipeline, and in high-quality research and innovation, will ensure we can build on our competitive advantages and futureproof the economy.

**The next Government should aim for at least 3% GDP to be invested in R&D by 2030. Steady and predictable increases in public investment, in particular for research block grants that can be used strategically by universities, will mean we can work with our partners to increase capacity and capabilities, advance knowledge, and position the UK as a global powerhouse in science and research from which everyone can benefit.**

## Tackling the productivity challenge

The UK has a productivity problem stretching back to the financial crisis. We don't have enough highly innovative start-up companies and we need to work harder to get innovative ideas and new technologies into existing companies and the public sector. The country also needs a broad range of creative, technical, management, financial, legal and leadership skills to succeed.

But the UK's research-intensive universities are well positioned to work more strategically and at scale to tackle these challenges head on.

Our universities are innovation hubs spinning out dozens of new companies every year and creating clusters of high value jobs and economic activity in their regions. They provide critical support from new discoveries to company formation and initial scale-up, with success stories ranging from small businesses to giant technology unicorns. Boosting funding streams with a proven track record of returns – such as the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) – and supporting the two-way flow of talent between academia and industry, will support the creation of new businesses and the adoption of high-potential, disruptive new technologies across the economy.



An additional £80m investment in HEIF supplements each year would deliver a return of nearly £1bn to our economy and society.

We would propose that the consequential funding this investment should generate in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland be used at the devolved level for equivalent purposes.

**The UK should also be ambitious in supporting hundreds of new deep-tech spinouts from universities through a new 'Spark Fund'. This could be delivered by the British Business Bank making investments in every nation and region of the UK, and through reforms to pension rules to help funds invest in high-potential spin-outs and start-ups, to deliver an additional £1bn of public and private investment by 2030.** For example, pension funds could invest in initiatives such as Northern Gritstone, which is aiming to create the world-class businesses of tomorrow based on the world-class science and innovation that exists in the North of England today.


### **Building to keep the UK at the cutting edge**

Backed by Russell Group universities and our partners, UK researchers punch above their weight and have built networks in every corner of the country supported by labs and other R&D and innovation facilities.

Access to cutting edge facilities – and the skilled people to run them – can be the difference between research teams or businesses bringing their ideas and talent to the UK or choosing to go elsewhere. Demand is growing and Russell Group universities have responded, delivering record investment in new research spaces. We are also working closely with Further Education colleges and local and national employers to develop the range of technical and other skills needed to support research and innovation.

But the UK needs to move faster to make the most of research opportunities, create high value jobs and capture investment that could easily go to other countries.

**A Research and Innovation Guarantee in the National Planning Framework, with fast-track applications for research and innovation facilities and reformed VAT rules for new research facilities shared with business, would unlock development to support new clusters of high-tech businesses across the UK.**



We can unlock  
£1bn every year for  
every extra £80m  
invested in the  
Higher Education  
Innovation Fund.

# A GREEN FUTURE

Tackling the climate crisis and building a green future is an enormous challenge but our universities – with partners here and around the world – are working to deliver solutions that can help meet ambitious climate targets and secure clean, sustainable growth right across the country.

We are also giving all our students the opportunity to learn about sustainability issues and the skills and confidence to challenge the status quo, which will be vital as organisations drive towards Net Zero.



More than 90% of research at Russell Group universities is world-leading or internationally excellent.

## Research that brings Net Zero closer to reality

Research at Russell Group universities has the potential to create breakthroughs which can cut energy prices for families and transform the way the UK does business to decarbonise the economy. From renewables to zero emission aviation, smart grids and carbon capture and storage, the next Government can build on targets set at COP26 in Glasgow and secure a leadership role for the UK in energy security and the clean industries of the future.

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**University-business partnerships are delivering advances in new materials, recycling, heat pumps, energy storage and smart systems which are already shifting the dial in terms of the UK's ability to hit ambitious Net Zero targets.**

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We are working with global businesses on power electronics, magnets, batteries and lightweight materials needed for advanced air, sea, and land transport, and on hydrogen for industrial applications. We are also leading the way in behavioural research to understand how people use energy and resources now – in their homes, travel, work and recreation – so that we will have a better idea of how technological and other solutions for achieving Net Zero can best be deployed.

The research, and the skills we create through that work, will be critical for the UK's future and we are pleased that this is already a top priority for public and private R&D investment. But we also want to get our Net Zero research ideas tested and put into use faster and more effectively.

Too often, research teams and entrepreneurs face funding gaps and struggle to access the timely financial support they need to spin out new technologies, incentivise behaviour change and grow clean businesses.

**The next Government should provide a dedicated Green Boost to tried and tested UKRI funding streams that encourage universities and businesses to work together. Smart regulation, proof of concept and innovative public procurement opportunities would also help translate Net Zero ideas from UK research into reality.**

## Building greener campuses and sharing best practice

Hitting Net Zero targets will require leadership and determination as well as cutting edge R&D and new skills. New technologies and new ways of doing things will have to be trialled in the real world to show what can be achieved – in turn, helping to reduce the risks for those who might follow.

Russell Group universities are already working hard to decarbonise their own campuses and activities around the UK and are determined to make significant further progress as fast as possible. We want to be trailblazers and use this to bring others along with us – in particular, the many businesses that supply us with goods and services – but we recognise this will need significant investment to realise our Net Zero ambitions.

**To accelerate progress towards Net Zero, the next Government should capitalise on the unique resources, expertise and influencing power of the sector. By carving out part of the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero's £1bn Net Zero Innovation portfolio and creating a lighter touch regulatory environment, it could support institutions to reduce their carbon footprint and create a network of Trailblazer Universities to showcase UK leadership and share best practice.**



# A HEALTHY FUTURE

The Covid-19 pandemic showed how universities can work with the NHS, businesses, and a wide range of other partners to respond quickly to new health threats, delivering vaccines and treatments that saved lives and protecting the economy by allowing the UK to come out of lockdown safely.

There is nothing more important than protecting the health of individuals, families and communities, and our universities are developing the solutions and skills to tackle health inequality so everyone can have a healthier future.



Russell Group universities train 80% of new UK doctors and dentists.

## Building an NHS workforce to cut waiting lists

We are proud to work with the NHS and all our health and social care partners across the UK. Alongside these partners, Russell Group universities train the nurses, doctors, dentists, technicians and other professionals the NHS needs to cut waiting lists and bring advanced technologies and treatments into everyday use. We also offer courses to new and existing staff in areas such as digital healthcare and innovation, helping to develop leaders who can realise opportunities to transform their organisations and bring in new approaches to healthcare that puts patients first.

Dedicated people are at the heart of the NHS. Increasing our healthcare workforce in line with the ambitions set out in the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan will be crucial for the future.

**A new medical training taskforce involving all stakeholders – universities, NHS trusts, relevant professional bodies and local and central Government – in workforce planning and implementation would ensure a strategic, collaborative and coordinated approach.**

Securing a pipeline of home-grown health and social care skills for the future requires a long-term commitment to training and for the funding available to universities, hospitals and others to at least keep pace with the costs of teaching. **A healthcare education guarantee locking in funding increases for training at least in line with inflation will ensure universities can train more healthcare professionals in the UK, helping to cut NHS waiting lists and ensuring the best possible care for patients.**

## New technologies and treatments for the NHS

Medical expertise and research from Russell Group universities helped deliver breakthroughs like the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine, other novel therapies, diagnostics and med-tech advances that saved thousands of lives during the pandemic. This success was built on decades of previous research. It demonstrated clearly how important it is to have private and charity funders of research alongside public investment in the UK, and for funders to make investments for the long-term while also being flexible if major opportunities and challenges arise.

While we have seen stunning successes in the treatment of some diseases, the UK's ageing population is prone to more complex health problems that will need new approaches bringing together the best ideas from social science, medicine and technology. We are working now to deliver more effective diagnostics and treatments for conditions including dementia, diabetes, heart disease and cancer, and to help tackle global and emerging health challenges.

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**Our research is improving the quality of life for individuals and brings significant economic benefits too – seen in the vibrant health and life science clusters around many of our universities – but we want to do more.**

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We should aspire to be the country of choice for clinical trials, open up digital health records, and build on pioneering work in genetics, AI-driven diagnostics, and advanced robotics to transform patient services with earlier diagnosis and better treatments. We also need to support NHS teams to embed research as a core part of their business and harness opportunities to pull innovative ideas into use through new approaches to public procurement. In turn, this could deliver new investment from overseas businesses and funding bodies to supercharge UK commitments, helping to attract and anchor key research partners in the UK.

**Setting an ambition for our NHS to become the world's leading health and life sciences research platform – working with universities to make research a core part of its function – would support investment through life science clusters and drive a productive and healthy nation.**

# SECURING OUR PLACE IN THE WORLD

**We should celebrate the UK's position as a world-leader in education exports and research. Building on this success through an ambitious new international education strategy and participation in European and global research collaboration programmes will deliver for businesses, create new jobs and opportunities in every city and region of the country, and boost UK soft power around the world.**

## Leading the world in Higher Education exports

Russell Group universities have a global reputation for teaching and research quality that has helped the UK achieve its international student recruitment target years ahead of schedule.

International students help make UK Higher Education what it is. They ensure home students are exposed to new views and different perspectives during their studies, protect student choice by making more high-quality courses economically viable, and education exports now contribute more to the UK economy than the pharmaceutical sector.

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**Higher Education exports are one of the UK's biggest exports – bringing an annual net benefit of £37.4bn to the UK economy and supporting thousands of jobs in businesses and communities across the country.**

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International students are our business partners of the future. We gain significant soft power advantages through the welcome and experience we give them and through the networks and friendships students create while they study and live in the UK. This is invaluable in a world of uncertain geopolitics, new alliances and business opportunities that will shape the future.

Ensuring the UK's international student offer through the visa system is comparable with that of our competitors will increase attractiveness for prospective international students, helping diversify recruitment. We should also welcome that some of the world's most talented and entrepreneurial students would like to stay here and work for a while after graduating, directly contributing to the economy.

**An ambitious new 2030 International Education Strategy along with a supportive visa system, including maintaining the current Graduate visa, would help grow the UK's position as a**

**global Higher Education powerhouse. This will act as a catalyst to continue attracting the best global talent to the UK, boosting our skills base, securing new economic benefits and enhancing our soft power advantages.**

## European and global research collaboration

Modern science is team science, interdisciplinary and international. Through the Horizon programmes, we have had access to ready-made routes for talent flow, facilities access and collaboration with multiple countries – across Europe and beyond. The scale of research supported is helping deliver medical breakthroughs, renewable energy technologies and other advances to improve all our lives. The UK has critical strengths in many areas of R&D, but we cannot do everything ourselves. Association to Horizon Europe for the full duration of the programme is a win for the UK that will strengthen our competitiveness in new fields and help our universities recruit the best global talent.

Beyond Europe there are also significant opportunities to develop and strengthen research and innovation partnerships with like-minded countries such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, Canada and the USA. Some of this can be done with new Free Trade Agreements, and initiatives such as AUKUS, that can be used to deepen research collaborations. In a number of critical technology areas, advances are happening at a rapid pace and we need to be at the heart of global collaborations, ethics and regulatory developments. We should also show leadership in helping emerging nations tackle environmental, health and other challenges through genuine partnerships – an area where Russell Group universities are determined to enhance their activities over the coming years.



**Association to Horizon Europe will keep the UK's world-leading R&D system at the cutting edge of research into new technologies that will transform our economy and society. An early commitment to Horizon Europe's successor programme should be made, allowing the UK to build its leadership position in key scientific fields and harness the scale advantage of the world's largest ongoing programme for research and innovation.** The next Government should also look to create new opportunities to strengthen our research links with leading and emerging nations around the globe to build UK resilience and help our partners address UN sustainable development goals.

### **Keeping the UK's research safe**

Research and innovation being carried out at our universities is helping transform the way the UK can anticipate and respond to risk associated with everything from cyber-attacks to climate change, health and much more. It will also underpin our future economy and opportunities for sustainable growth.

Universities play a crucial role in building the UK's national security, but we know our research can also be a prime target for hostile states. This is why we are working closely with the Government to protect our national interest. We also recognise that with new scientific breakthroughs bringing new risks it is important we react quickly as threats emerge and evolve.

**A UK Research Security Fund, similar in scale to a successful model already operating in Canada, would support the development of new security infrastructure for universities, build on world-leading initiatives like the Government's Research Collaboration Advice Team and enhance university efforts to counter foreign interference.**



Every additional 1% growth in market share for international students could boost the UK economy by more than £5bn a year

## **RUSSELL**

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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