



RUSSELL GROUP

International students and fair admissions

Our universities are committed to fair admissions for UK and overseas applicants

International students are an important part of the student body at our universities, bringing diverse perspectives that enrich the learning environment. They also make a significant contribution to the UK and local economies.¹

International students are not taking the places of domestic students. Indeed, despite the shortfalls in government funding for UK students, our universities have been able to grow the number of places for UK undergraduates over time *because of* the funding they receive from international student fees.

Russell Group universities are committed to fair admissions. For each degree programme, our universities have minimum entry requirements that are equivalent for all students, whether they are from the UK or abroad.

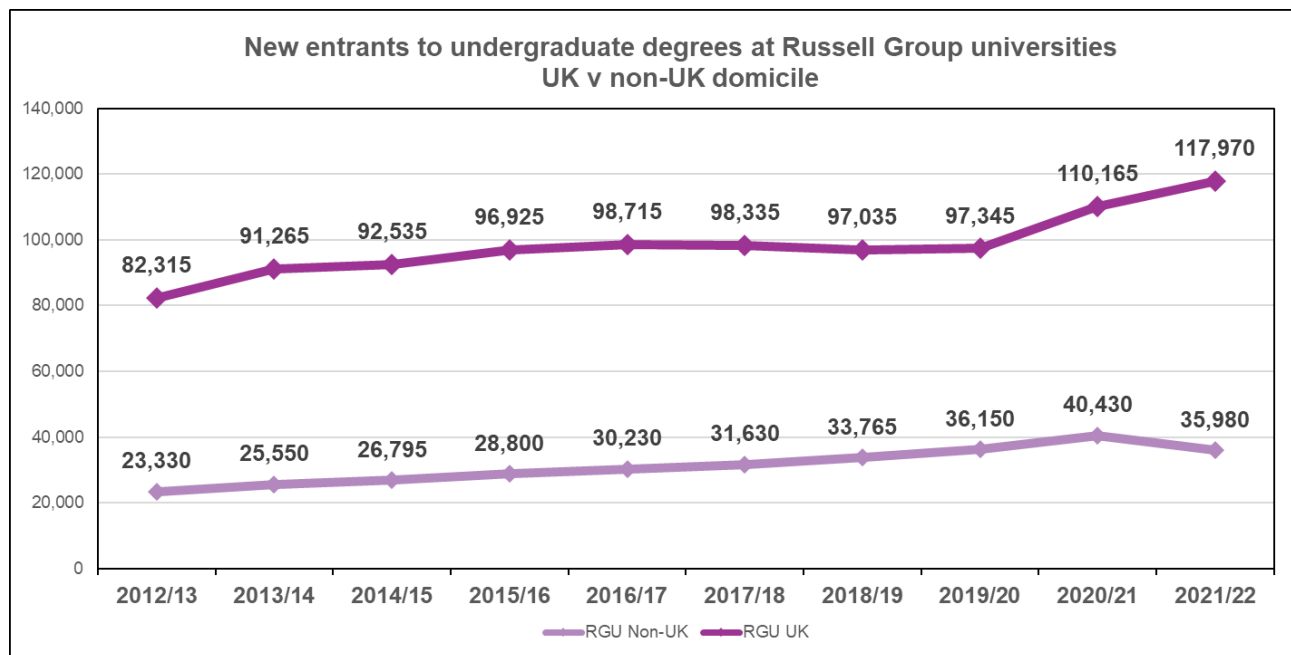
We welcome greater transparency of admissions processes and international pathway courses. **The Russell Group is supporting the QAA review of International Foundation and Year One programmes.** Our universities that use these programmes are volunteering to have them included in this review and are strongly encouraging any pathway providers they partner with to do so also.

Many UK universities use agents to recruit international students, whether directly or through partnership programmes. **Those Russell Group universities that use recruitment agents are committed to the UK Agent Quality Framework (AQF), which is also endorsed by the Russell Group.**

International students support the growth of UK places

International students are not taking the places of domestic students. Indeed, despite the shortfalls in government funding for UK students, our universities have been able to grow the number of places for UK undergraduates over time *because of* the funding they receive from international student fees.

The latest HESA data shows that over the last decade, intakes of both UK and international students taking undergraduate degrees have increased across the Russell Group.² UK students make up around 3/4 of all undergraduates:



Russell Group analysis suggests that in English universities the cost of teaching each UK undergraduate is on average £2,500 per student per year more than universities receive in tuition fees from students and grant income from the Office for Students. Higher education is a devolved matter but the funding pressures seen in England are mirrored, and often intensified, within the other Home Nations.

While fees are capped for home students, this is not the case for international students studying in the UK. Universities can therefore raise additional income from the international student market to reinvest in teaching, learning and the wider student experience for all students – a model replicated in other countries such as Australia and Canada.

International student admissions

Russell Group universities are committed to fair admissions. For each degree programme, our universities have minimum entry requirements that are equivalent for all students, whether they are from the UK or abroad.

Staff at Russell Group universities have extensive experience and knowledge in mapping a multitude of different qualifications, both from the UK (e.g. A-levels, T-levels, BTECs, Scottish Highers and the International Baccalaureate) and overseas, to make informed judgements about the equivalence of these assessments. Judgements on international qualifications are supported by ECCTIS, the internationally-respected advisory service on grade comparisons.³ For some courses, additional interviews and/or tests are also required as part of the admissions process.

Our universities typically set intake targets for each undergraduate course years in advance of each admissions cycle and this can include setting separate targets for home and international students. Managing these intakes through offer-making and decisions at confirmation and Clearing is a complex but carefully managed process to ensure the right number of students are admitted to each course.⁴

Ultimately, our universities want to make sure that all students they admit are treated fairly and are academically prepared to succeed on their course. There is also regulatory oversight to ensure this: the Office for Students monitors student outcomes, including continuation and completion rates of UK and international students, and will investigate if it has any concerns. Professional bodies are also involved in setting standards and assessing the quality of many courses, for example the General Medical Council for medical degrees. At English Russell Group universities, there is less than one percentage point difference in degree completion rates between international students (94.7%) and UK students (95.6%).

International Foundation and Year One programmes

Some of our universities offer pathway programmes specifically for international students with the aim of bridging the gap in their educational experience, having studied in education systems that differ from the UK.

International Foundation programmes are level 3 courses (similar to A-levels) designed to prepare students for undergraduate study. They are aimed at students who cannot apply directly onto a degree programme because of differences in their education system: for example, in many countries around the world students typically complete 12 years of education (instead of the 13 years that is standard in England) and most don't have A-level qualifications.

Those Russell Group universities accepting students through international foundation programmes either run these courses themselves or in partnership with an external provider. The most common partners are Kaplan, Study Group and INTO, which are all registered with the Office for Students. Where courses are delivered by external partners, academics from Russell Group universities are closely involved in approving curricula, entry requirements, assessments and marking schemes.

Completing an International Foundation programme does not guarantee entry onto a degree course. Most Russell Group universities require assessment marks between 60% and 70% for students to progress to degree level following the foundation year. For some courses, students must meet an overall minimum grade while also meeting a minimum for specific modules. This reflects the variation in A-level and subject-specific entry requirements. The progression rate of international students from a foundation year programme to a degree course at those Russell Group universities who run these programmes is typically around 70%.

Along with others in the sector, some Russell Group universities accept a smaller number of students from International Year One programmes. These are level 4 courses, designed to be the equivalent of year one of an undergraduate programme, but tailored to the needs of an international audience. Students who are successful on these courses may enter year two of the corresponding undergraduate programme, but progression is not guaranteed.

We welcome greater transparency of admissions processes and international pathway courses. **The Russell Group is supporting the QAA review of International Foundation and Year One programmes.** Our universities that use these programmes are volunteering to have them included in this review and are strongly encouraging any pathway providers they partner with to do so also. If any practice is found that falls below the standards we would expect, and the standards set by funders and regulators, then our universities will take swift appropriate action.

Recruitment agents

Many UK universities use agents to recruit international students, whether directly or through partnership programmes. **Those Russell Group universities that use recruitment agents⁵ are committed to the UK**

Agent Quality Framework (AQF), which is also endorsed by the Russell Group.⁶ In line with this pledge, all Russell Group universities that use agents will have information published on their webpages.

The Russell Group and its members firmly agree that any use of agents must demonstrate good practice at all times, providing international students and their families with professional, honest and accurate guidance. Where the behaviour of individual agents has clearly fallen short of these high standards, contracts have been reviewed and terminated.

Recruitment agents are used openly and legitimately across the higher education landscape, and can:

- help students understand the UCAS application process
- inform students of the range of courses and institutions available to them
- guide students through the often-complex immigration visa process
- reduce the need for individual universities to establish their own in-country teams, increasing efficiency in finances and infrastructure.

References

¹ The latest data shows a single cohort of international students produces a net benefit of £37bn for the UK economy:

<https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Full-Report-Benefits-and-costs-of-international-students.pdf>

² This Russell Group analysis is based on student data from HESA of First Degree (ie bachelor's degrees) undergraduate new entrants by domicile. Over the last 10 years, the number of UK students starting undergraduate degrees has been steadily rising, with a notable increase since 2019-20 – primarily driven by the awarding of teacher assessed grades during Covid. The gradual increase in equivalent international students over the same period peaked at 40,430 students in 2020/21 and decreased in 2021-22, primarily driven by fewer EU students enrolling on courses post-Brexit.

³ www.ecctis.com/Universities%20And%20Colleges/Default.aspx

⁴ Universities have autonomy over student admissions, as confirmed in the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. This means each university can set its own entry requirements and admission processes. Some Russell Group universities make contextual offers to UK applicants and/or provide UK foundation year programmes as part of their fair admissions practice.

⁵ Oxford, Cambridge, LSE and Imperial do not use international recruitment agents.

⁶ BUILA UK Agent Quality Framework Universities' Pledge www.buila.ac.uk/uk-agent-quality-framework-universities-pledge