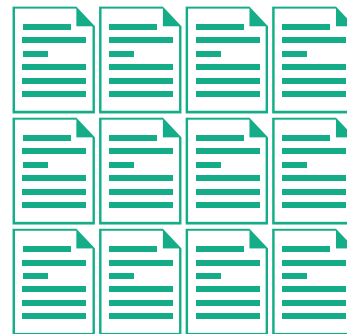


Admissions processes – myth-busting

Myth 1

The number of applications to a university or course indicates quality.

This is not the case. Some Russell Group universities receive relatively low numbers of applications partly because students rule themselves out due to the high grades required. In 2020, the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, for example, received on average six applications per place. This is lower than other Russell Group universities which received around seven and a half applications per place.¹ Nevertheless, both Oxford and Cambridge provide courses of very high quality, regularly appearing at the top of league tables and receiving good feedback through the National Student Survey.



The number of applications per place will also vary significantly by course within an individual university. For example, the University of Cambridge receives over nine applications per place for architecture and roughly two applications per place for Classics,² yet all these courses rank very highly. Try to encourage your students to avoid making assumptions about the quality of a university or course based on the number of applications.

Myth 2

Russell Group universities never enter Clearing.


Clearing is how universities and colleges fill any places they still have on their courses. Russell Group universities run popular courses that often fill up during the initial application process. Some do enter Clearing for a small number of courses, although they may only have a very limited number of places available.

¹ Calculated using data from UCAS website: <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-data-resources-2020/2020-entry-provider-level-end-cycle-data-resources>

² Available from the University of Cambridge: www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/apply/statistics

Myth 3

If a university takes a long time to respond to an applicant it means they are not really interested in the applicant.

This is not true. Different universities have different admissions processes and this might mean it takes longer for some to respond than others. For example, some universities may wait until the application deadline before making decisions. If the student's application was submitted early, this can feel like a long wait. For more information, refer to our guidebook, **How do admissions processes work?** 



Myth 4

Students should apply to universities and courses that receive the lowest number of applications because they will be more likely to get an offer.

Russell Group universities consider a wide range of information to ensure they make offers to applicants with the most talent, potential and ability to succeed on the course.

In 2020, the University of Cambridge received 1,633 applications for mathematics and made 548 offers for 251 places. In comparison, engineering received 2,518 applications and made 420 offers for 363 places.³ Although about 35% fewer applicants applied for mathematics, they were almost equally as likely to end up with a place compared to engineering applicants.

It is important to understand that figures like this do not demonstrate factors such as how likely applicants are to achieve the entry requirements, how strong their applications are, or whether they will make the university their firm or insurance choice.

Application to offer ratios will vary by university and course for a wide range of reasons and the number of applications should not be an important factor when choosing which courses to apply for. What is important is that applicants make the best choices for them. If your student chooses the right course and university after reflecting on their abilities, interests and experience, they are more likely to write a strong application, make the most of university life and complete the programme successfully.

³ Available at www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/apply/statistics

Myth 5

Universities do not read the personal statement.

The personal statement is used in different ways depending on the university and the course applied for. Some university admissions teams score a personal statement against set criteria, while others will check that it is broadly satisfactory. For some courses, the personal statement can make the difference between an offer and an unsuccessful application.

Other courses may weight the personal statement less heavily and place more emphasis on predicted grades, interviews or test results.


Your students will be applying for up to five courses with just one application and personal statement. All the courses applied to will have different requirements and follow different admissions processes. It is therefore important that they develop a good personal statement. See strand two, **How do I help my students apply to university?** , for further information on writing a personal statement.



Myth 6

Universities prefer independent school students.

This is not true. Russell Group universities want to attract the best possible students. Russell Group universities are wholeheartedly committed to ensuring their doors are wide open to talented and able students from all backgrounds. The proportion of students from state schools and colleges in Russell Group universities increased from 68.3% to 78.3% between 1997 and 2018.⁴

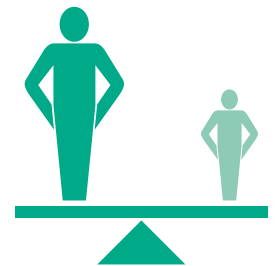
Many courses receive more applications than places available and well-qualified applicants from any school or college may therefore be unsuccessful. There can be many reasons for this but it will not be because a university prefers a certain school or college. See our guidebook, **How do admissions processes work?** , for further information on what admissions staff are looking for.

⁴ HESA UK Performance Indicators


Myth 7

It is important to have lots of impressive work experience for all courses and universities.

Work experience can be crucial in helping your students find out whether the choices they are making are the right ones. Relevant work experience may be an essential component when applying to vocational subjects such as teaching, veterinary science and health-related programmes including medicine and nursing. For other courses, the student's knowledge of and enthusiasm for the subject will be more relevant.





Where work experience is required, Russell Group universities recognise that not everyone will have access to the same opportunities to gain work experience and will consider this when making admissions decisions.

Students do not need extensive or impressive work experience; what a student has learned is most important. Encourage your students to keep a diary during their placement to help them reflect. See our guidebook, **How do I help my students choose a university and course?** , for tips on how to support your students with work experience.

Myth 8


Russell Group universities do not accept BTECs, Access qualifications or T Levels.

Many Russell Group universities welcome applicants studying vocational qualifications, including BTEC level 3, for some of their courses. Vocational qualifications can be a good route to relevant degree programmes. However, they may not be appropriate for students applying for courses that are not immediately relevant to those qualifications and some universities do not accept vocational qualifications for any of their courses. Where vocational qualifications are accepted, universities may ask that they are studied alongside other qualifications such as certain subjects at A-level. Many Russell Group universities have indicated that they will accept T Level qualifications and a list of universities accepting them is provided on the **Education & Skills Funding Agency website** . It is very important that your students check the entry requirements of individual universities and contact admissions teams if they are unsure. For further information, see our guide on **Alternative routes into competitive universities** .

Myth 9

Admissions staff do not want to read about a student's experience on a summer school that was not held at their university.

Generally, students are advised not to mention particular universities in their personal statement to ensure it remains relevant to the multiple universities they are applying to. However, this is not the case when writing about attending an outreach activity such as a summer school. Russell Group universities want to hear about an applicant's experience of outreach regardless of where it took place. They understand how valuable outreach can be for raising aspirations and supporting students to choose the best university and course for them. They also recognise that universities often target outreach work in their local community and students may attend activities run by their local university as a result.

The most important thing is that students explain what they learned about themselves and about university study in their personal statement. For further information, see strand two, **How do I help my students apply to university?** .

Myth 10

Universities favour international students over UK students.

Universities do not favour international students. Universities do recognise the benefit of having a mix of international and UK students on campus, which creates a more diverse and interesting learning environment. However, most Russell Group universities will only admit a certain percentage of international students. In 2019/20, roughly 16% of all undergraduate students were not from the UK.⁵

Importantly, universities evaluate international students in similar ways to UK students. International students also have to meet a university's admissions requirements.



⁵ Higher Education Statistics Agency <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from>

Myth 11

Universities have unlimited places and can therefore offer a place to any highly qualified applicant.


Universities plan the number of places available for each course years in advance, considering the resources required to ensure a first-rate student experience. Although they can increase the number of places if they receive more high-quality applications than expected, universities need to make sure that they have sufficient facilities available to offer an excellent learning and teaching environment. For example, universities need to provide enough academic staff to teach, ensure that there is laboratory space to accommodate students and have library facilities that respond to diverse needs.

It is important to note that the number of places available is not always at the discretion of the university. Medicine, for example, has its numbers regulated by Health Education England.

In addition, the Scottish Government places strict limits on the number of places Scottish universities can offer to applicants from Scotland and the EU. There are no Scottish Government limits applied to the number of places available to applicants from England, Wales, Northern Ireland and countries outside the EU.

Myth 12

Russell Group universities do not deliver foundation programmes.

Many Russell Group universities deliver foundation programmes. These range across all subject areas including medicine, sciences and the arts. Foundation courses are designed to provide an alternative route to university. If a student does not have the formal qualifications for immediate entry to an undergraduate course, a foundation programme can help prepare them for degree-level study and gain the necessary academic knowledge. Foundation programmes are often targeted at students from under-represented backgrounds. For further information, see our guide to **Alternative routes into competitive universities** .

