

A photograph of several students sitting in a lecture hall. In the foreground, a young man with glasses and a black jacket is looking down. Next to him, a young man in a blue and black jacket is smiling and looking at a small object in his hands. To his right, a young man in a black jacket is smiling and looking down. In the background, other students are visible, including a woman with a purple hair clip and a man with glasses. The students are sitting in green and grey upholstered seats.

TEACHER

**6/10
applicants
get a place
on RO**

**One programme
9 leading universities
Over 6000 courses**

**REALISING
OPPORTUNITIES**
Working Together | Supporting Talent

Realising Opportunities

For over 16 years Realising Opportunities (RO) has been supporting students during their post-16 studies to develop their skills to be successful at university. Since 2009, RO has supported over 15,000 students from over 500 schools and colleges. The programme is intended for the most talented students who have not considered research intensive universities (RIUs) as an option.

This guide is designed to help you identify students at your school/college who would be suitable for a place on RO and support their application onto the programme. Applications to the programme will open on 1 September 2025. See page 7 for details on the application process.

Recent independent evaluation shows that 74% of programme graduates progress to higher education. 67% progress to research intensive universities which represents higher rates than the national averages.

Targeting students

RO is a targeted widening participation programme promoting fair access and social mobility. RO supports young people from underrepresented groups to gain access to some of the country's leading RIUs. To do this we specifically target **Year 12/First year of college** students who meet the individual criteria on pages 3-4.

Please target eligible students from a range of subject areas within your school/college who would benefit the most from the RO programme. Places on the programme are very limited and meeting the eligibility criteria does not guarantee a place on the programme. RO is intended for the most talented students who have not considered research intensive universities (RIUs) as an option.

RO is committed to supporting diverse groups of eligible students who are underrepresented in higher education. Therefore, we particularly welcome applications from:

- Eligible male students, as they are currently underrepresented on the RO programme.
- Students who live in neighbourhoods with low rates of progression to university - we determine these as those students living in postcodes in POLAR4 Quintiles 1 and 2. **For more information on POLAR classification please visit the Office for Students website.**

You can visit the RO website to check students' postcodes.

Eligibility criteria

To be eligible to apply for a place on the Realising Opportunities programme students must meet the criteria laid out below.

STEP 1

Students must meet **all** of the following criteria*:

Attend a state-funded school/college which is currently working with an RO Partner university to deliver the RO programme. If they are home schooled you should see the website for further information.



Are studying in Year 12 (or equivalent) in England.



Have achieved at least five grade 9-6 at GCSE (or equivalent, eg GNVQ, BTEC certificate); if this does not include English Language and Mathematics they must have achieved at least a grade 4 in these subjects.



Be a Home registered student or expect to be by the time they apply for higher education. If they are not a Home registered student, but are classed as an asylum seeker or have a temporary status, please see the RO website for further details*.

**If students
meet all of the
criteria in STEP
1, move to
STEP 2**

STEP 2

The more of the below criteria a student meets, the more likely they are to secure a place on the RO programme. Students who meet fewer than two of the Step 2 criteria are unlikely to be offered a place on the programme, with exceptions for some groups of students*, as RO is oversubscribed each year.

Live in a neighbourhood which has a low progression rate to higher education or an area which has a high level of financial, social or economic deprivation. This is defined by **home postcode**.

Be in the **first generation** of their family to attend university in the UK or abroad. (If one or more parent is currently studying their first degree, or graduated from their first degree within the last five years, an application will still be considered).

Be in receipt of or entitled to **free school meals**, or have been entitled to them at a point in the last six years.

Be in receipt of or entitled to **discretionary payments/16-19 bursary/Pupil Premium** at school/college.

Attend or have attended a **school/college performing below the national average** in key areas or where there is higher than the national average number of students eligible for free school meals. Click [here](#) to go our website where school/college criteria are explained.

OR

If they are living in/have lived in **local authority care**, are a **young carer**, or are **estranged/living independently** from their family, we strongly encourage them to apply even if they don't meet other Step 2 criteria. This is because their application will be given additional consideration.



If students do not meet prior attainment outlined in Step 1 but have experienced a period of disrupted education, their application may still be considered on an individual basis. Please see our website for further information.

See the RO website for full eligibility information

*We recommend [checking our website for the full eligibility criteria](#) which contains more information about how students may be eligible. You can also check the eligibility of students' postcodes on our website.

Benefits of the programme



Alternative offers

from the RO Partner universities which are typically two grades lower than the standard offer. †



Additional consideration

when students make applications to RO Partner universities through UCAS.



A Launch event

with their host university to celebrate their place on the RO programme, get them started, and meet university representatives.



Experiences and support

to help them make an informed choice about higher education and research intensive universities.

† The majority of courses at RO Partner universities give alternative offers but there are some exceptions. Students who are successful in gaining a place on RO will be informed of the exceptions when they begin the programme.



A chance to develop their skills

in analysis, critical thinking, evaluation and research through taking the the RO Academic Skills Module (ASM).



A wide range of events and activities

at the RO Partner universities. Support for travel costs may be available for some events



Skills4Uni

An online study skills course and multiple choice quiz which will help them develop their planning and independent research skills.



Online support

through which students can get answers to their questions from both current university students who have been in their shoes and staff from the RO Partner universities.



A Partnership Fair and Summer information sessions

covering topics including Student Finance, University Applications, and Student Life. These sessions will be delivered by industry experts and tailored to the specific requirements of our cohort.

The application process

Host
university
contact

Your university contact will set you up as a School User on the secure online Realising Opportunities (RO) hub.

School
User

You will receive an email alert which allows you to set your password.

You can log into the hub at
www.realisingopportunities.co.uk

Here you can review student applications and then review their progress at any time while they are taking part in RO. Please do not share your login details with anyone.

School
User

To begin the application process, issue eligible students with the *Student Application Key* given to you by your host university contact.

School
User

Ask students to complete the online application at
www.realisingopportunities.co.uk/apply

They should enter the *Student Application Key* when asked to do so.



Students

Students complete the online application following the on-screen instructions. Progress can be saved at any time and completed at a later date. Students will be asked to read and agree to **RO Code of Conduct**.

Parent/ Carer*

Once students have submitted their application, an automated email will be sent to their parent/carer's email address. This email instructs the parent/carer to fill in their part of the online application and give permission for their child to take part in the programme.

*Where students are living independently of parent(s)/carer(s) they will be asked to indicate this on their application. When they submit their application it will come directly to you. You will need to confirm their status as a student who is living independently when you complete the School User section.



Once the parent/carer section of the application has been completed, you will receive a notification email informing you that you have an application waiting. Please log in and find the relevant application, click '**continue application**' and complete the School User section. You are responsible for confirming each student's eligibility by checking that all of the information in the application is correct.

Please ensure that you have checked your student's education journey to see if there has been any disrupted education prior to submitting your section of the application form.

Once you have completed the School User section and all student information is complete and correct please submit the application. Your host university contact will then receive an email notification confirming you have completed your section of the application.



Your host university contact will check over the application and review the information provided to decide on application outcomes. Applications which meet the most eligibility criteria will be prioritised. Information provided on extenuating circumstances will be considered alongside eligibility criteria.



All students will be informed of application outcomes no later than 5 January 2026.



You will be able to login to the RO hub and see your students' application outcomes after 5 January 2026.

Completing the programme

Students must complete three compulsory elements of the programme to complete RO:

- Attend at least two RO events or activities (these can be the Launch and any Summer Session information session, or the Partnership Fair) **to explore student life at RIUs.**
- Pass the Skills4Uni online multiple choice quiz **to develop study skills.**
- Complete the RO Academic Skills Module (ASM) **to increase study skills confidence.**

To find out more about the Realising Opportunities programme and its benefits, please click [here](#) to go to our website.

University of Birmingham

University of Exeter

University of Leeds

University of Leicester

Loughborough University

Newcastle University

Queen Mary University
of London

University of Warwick

University of York



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Contact

The RO Central Team co-ordinates the programme on behalf of the RO Partner universities.

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www.realisingopportunities.ac.uk

 [realising_opportunities](https://www.instagram.com/realising_opportunities)
 [@RealisingOpps](https://twitter.com/RealisingOpps)
 [RealisingOpportunities](https://www.facebook.com/RealisingOpportunities)