



Universities UK  
International

# Annual Report 2023-24







## A thank you from our Director

At Universities UK International (UUKi), our aim is to support our members to thrive internationally. Every university is different, but there is a shared ambition to use our international reputation and profile to drive growth and prosperity in the UK, expand opportunity and access to higher education across the world, and deliver transformative research and innovation that addresses global challenges.

To do so, our universities need a stable, enabling policy environment, and helping to secure this is central to our mission at UUKi.

However, the past year has been anything but stable. While the last academic year began with positive news – that our association to Horizon Europe had been finally confirmed - there is no doubt that this has been a difficult and challenging period for universities. Uncertainty over the UK's offer to international students seriously undermined our attractiveness as a study destination. The recruitment environment has been extremely difficult.

Despite the very clear challenges, the decision to retain the Graduate route demonstrated that a united voice could make a real difference. At UUKi, a huge part of our efforts went towards securing this outcome - but it was truly a collective effort.

While this dominated the headlines, the work of the UUKi team across all our priorities continued. Across our priority areas of attracting international staff and students, supporting the development of TNE, expanding international experience for UK students, fostering global research and innovation, and supporting the trusted research agenda, we sought to deliver several outcomes:

- **Delivering a stable and enabling policy and funding environment**
- **Building recognition of the positive contribution internationalisation makes to the U.K. and to the global good**



- **Fostering trust and confidence in the international activities of our members**
- **Supporting universities to develop the capability and capacity to respond to emerging challenges**

As you will see throughout this report, during a very difficult year so much has been achieved, and I am incredibly proud of what the UUKi team has delivered. Our organisation was recognised as joint winner - along with our good friends at UKCISA - of the Membership Organisation of the Year at the PIEoneer Awards in September 2023, which is fantastic recognition of the work done by the team.

Our aim in 2024-25 is that we continue to provide the support and insights that help you, our members, to deliver on your international ambitions. Now, with a new government in place, we will turn our attention to the future, and our goals key goals of rebuilding our international recruitment, rebuilding our participation in Horizon Europe, and maximising the contribution that our international activities make to communities right across the UK.

We remain dedicated to providing the best possible service to our members, funders, and partners. Thank you, as ever, for your engagement with our work, your challenge, and most of all your support. I look forward to working with you in the year ahead.

**Jamie Arrowsmith**  
Director UUKi





## Views from our members

**90% agree or strongly agree that UUKi does an excellent job in supporting their university's international aims.**

**'UUKi does excellent work in facilitating UK HEIs' work abroad both for larger, and for smaller and specialist providers'**

Professor John Strachan, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research & Enterprise) and Dean of Graduate College – Bath Spa University

**98% agree or strongly agree UUKi works effectively to positively influence UK policy on higher education and international issues.**

**'UUKi are doing an excellent job of helping HEIs navigate the extremely volatile political and economic environment both in the UK and globally'**

Professor Simon Guy, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Global – Lancaster University

**91% agree or strongly agree that UUKi supports its members to develop the understanding and resilience needed to meet new and emerging challenges.**

**'As a small specialist institution being connected in through UUKi provides us a framework of resources, support and services that we would not have funding/resources to access.'**

Scott Parsons, Director of Strategy and Marketing – The Glasgow School of Art

**92% agree or strongly agree UUKi represents the interests of their institutions effectively.**

**'Communications are excellent and lots of opportunities for PVCs to engage with peers, UUK and other sector bodies.'**

Professor Trevor Hoey, Vice Provost - International & Academic Partnerships – Brunel University

**'The activities of UUKi are invaluable. They continue to navigate the sector through an enormously challenging time. Their impact on government and on policy is vital. They speak for us in a way that we alone individually are not able to do.'**

Professor Judith Lamie, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for International Engagement – Swansea University

**95% agree or strongly agree that UUKi supports its members by informing them [or us] of new opportunities, challenges and policy developments.**

**'They (UUKi) promote the UK higher education brand to the international market, as well as articulate the contribution of UK higher education and their international communities to stakeholders within the UK.'**

Dr Liang-Fong Wong, Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Internationalisation) – University of Bristol



## When I think of UUKi...

**"... I think of trusted, hard-working and knowledgeable colleagues supporting the UK higher education sector across the international higher education agenda."**

Alan Mackay, Deputy Vice Principal International & Director – University of Edinburgh

**"...I think of strong, strategically focussed support."**

Warren Harrison, Pro-Vice-Chancellor International – Teesside University

**"... I think of hard-working, professional colleagues who are great advocates for UK universities."**

Professor Jennifer Watling, Vice-Chancellor International – Manchester Metropolitan University



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## Strategic Priority 1:

### To enable sustainable international student recruitment

Maintaining trust and confidence in universities' international student recruitment practices has been paramount during a period of sustained political pressure and media scrutiny. In response to media coverage in February and subsequent Government review on the use of agents and pathways provision, UUKi launched a series of actions. This included a review of the UK Agent Quality Framework and work to promote its adoption as well as a review of the UUK Fair Admissions Code of Practice, extending its scope to include international students and agent-supported admissions.

#### This year, we have:

- Worked with 125 UUK members who use agents to signed the pledge, which commits universities to implement measures to increase transparency and oversight of agents.
- In May, the UK Government formally endorsed the Agent Quality Framework and proposed to mandate it as a key component among a package of measures put forward as an alternative to restrictions on the Graduate route.
- In October 2023, we held our annual International Student Recruitment conference, bringing together experts from across the sector to share the latest thinking on this issue.

**125 UUK members**

who work with agents have signed the pledge which commits universities to implement measures to increase transparency and oversight of agents.

**92%**

of members agree or strongly agree that UUKi supports their institution to grow and diversify onshore recruitment of international students.







**“The behind-the-scenes work that went into the MAC report shows how UUK and UUKi are crucial to the sector”**

Guiliana Pieri, Executive Dean for Humanities and Vice-Principal (International)  
– Royal Holloway, University of London

## In focus:

# Leading the sector response to the review of the Graduate route

UUKi led the sector’s response to the Migration Advisory Committee’s (MAC) review of the Graduate route, and successfully secured commitment from the Government to maintain the post-study work visa on its current terms. This was achieved with the support, evidence and input of our members, and demonstrates of the vital impact the sector can have when working together.

### This year, we have:

- Produced updated [economic analysis](#) to highlight the additional £62.6bn net economic contribution to the UK economy from increased international student numbers following the introduction of the International Education Strategy and Graduate route.
- Developed a [myth buster guide](#) to respond to, and address, questions and concerns about international students and the Graduate route.
- Provided evidence and input directly to the MAC Secretariat over the course of their accelerated review into the Graduate route and convened a series of roundtables and workshops to enable the MAC to hear from UUKi members.
- Secured meetings with key politicians and advisors to discuss the importance of the Graduate route, and developed briefings for government and officials to ensure they had access to real-time data and updates on international student recruitment trends.

- Produced a member toolkit to support universities to engage with their local MPs and officials on the Graduate route, and co-ordinated media interventions from businesses and other groups in support of the [Graduate route](#).
- Continued to work with the [Office for National Statistics](#) to develop more accurate ways of capturing immigration to the UK by separating out permanent and temporary types of migration, and better understand international students’ post-study decision-making.

While international student recruitment remains challenging for many, the decision to retain the Graduate route on its current terms has been a clear win for the sector and provides the basis for a strategic and sustainable forward-looking approach to enabling international students to study in the UK.



# 2

## Strategic Priority 2: To enhance the scale and impact of international research and innovation (R&I) collaboration

EU Framework Programmes have proven to be crucial to UK and EU science, research and innovation, facilitating collaboration and providing long-term funding at a scale that is difficult to replicate unilaterally at national level. Following years of working with sector and the Government, UUKi welcomed the UK's association to the current Framework Programme, Horizon Europe. We remain committed to maximising the benefits of association and to rebuilding UK participation in Horizon Europe. More broadly, beyond Horizon, UUKi formalised our relationships with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) as a delivery partner for the International Science Partnerships Fund (ISPF).

### This year, we have:

- Contributed to securing UK's association to Horizon Europe, with association formally commencing on 1 January 2024.
- Participated in key high-level events, such as the Royal Society Horizon Europe association conference and UK Mission to the EU UK Science Summit 2024.
- Co-developed and co-delivered two in-person conferences with the UK Research Office (UKRO) - 'Driving Up Participation in Horizon Europe' and 'Horizon Europe Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions' with speakers from the European Commission.
- Provided the UUK perspective for the European University Association (EUA) consultation on the next EU Framework Programme FP10, recognising the status of associated countries. We also engaged with European representatives at EUA meetings to discuss upcoming aspects in FP10, including open science and dual-use technology.
- Delivered two bilateral global research and innovation webinars focusing on Brazil and South Africa (the latter co-developed/co-delivered with Universities South Africa). Both featured funding updates from key in-country organisations, case studies of successful research and innovations collaborations and virtual networking.
- Continued to work closely with the DSIT team and alongside major funders such as UKRI and the Academies, including making information on ISPF more accessible to our members, and have played a major part in consolidating ISPF calls through the [UUKi's Global R&I Funding Gateway](#).
- Worked with sector partners and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to deliver a report on 'The non-financial contribution of international postgraduate students to the UK', with report findings being launched at IHEF 2024.
- Influenced a change in the new international Co-Investigator Lead [policy](#), which UKRI have now expanded across all seven thematic research councils (with an opt-out option as appropriate). This follows a recommendation in [UUKi's Future International Partnerships report](#) (published in 2022).





# In focus:

## Events, networks, and funding opportunities

### Conference and events programme

UUKi's conference and events programme continues to grow to cover a wider section of UUKi priority areas. For 2024 the introduction of the Global Mobility conference saw high-level strategic conversations around the student mobility policy landscape taking place.

More than 2,000 delegates attended our conferences, network meetings and forums. This included more than 350 delegates at our flagship annual International Higher Education Forum (IHEF) 2024, which returned to an in-person two-day event at the University of London in May 2024, and held our fourth residential PVC Forum for 25 Pro-Vice-Chancellors at Beamish Hall in Durham.

IHEF 2025 will build on this success and takes place at the University of Birmingham from 4-5 June 2025.

### Networks

UUKi convenes a range of thematic, regional and strategic networks that bring together university leaders and higher education professionals to exchange insights, expertise and intelligence. During the 2023-24 academic year, close to 1,000 representatives from 129 universities participated in 20 network meetings.

Members representing 108 universities across all UK nations attended meetings of UUKi's PVC network, which brings together those with responsibility for the international strategy at their institution. In 2023-24, alongside its regular quarterly meetings, the network also came together for special meetings to discuss issues relating to the conflict in Israel/Gaza, as well as the impact of the MAC review.

### Funding opportunities

Over the course of 2023-2024, UUKi designed and delivered funded programmes on behalf of a wide range of partners, both in the UK and overseas – including Research England, DSIT, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and Mitacs Canada.

Our programmes have created a range of opportunities for our members and the sector: continuing to support and grow research partnerships with Ukrainian universities, creating global mobility opportunities for UK academics, and facilitating overseas study opportunities to Canada and the US through the Globalink Research Internship scheme and Thouron Awards respectively.

**89%**  
of members found  
PVCi network meetings  
valuable or very valuable.



# In focus:

## Campaigns

Last year we launched our #WeAreInternational: Transforming Lives campaign, featuring ten international students and graduates telling their stories. Polling from our partners at Find A University in early 2024 showed that prospective international students who are aware of the #WeAreInternational campaign are significantly more likely to see the UK as a more welcoming study destination.

This year, the campaign continued to make the case for international students and their contribution to the UK with the aim of combatting the negative rhetoric which continued to surround this topic. Working closely with a new cohort of ten university partners, the latest series of films highlighted the important contribution international students make to their campuses and communities, this time with an additional focus on graduate outcomes and the amazing things international students achieve after they study in the UK.

### Since the relaunch in May 2023, the campaign has achieved:

- More than 100 universities have joined the campaign, including 20 campaign partners who shared student case studies.
- Six high-profile content partnerships with sector organisations: Find A Uni; IDP; NCUK; QS; Study Group; and UCAS.
- In our paid social media polling, 39% of prospective international students we surveyed felt the UK seemed like a more welcoming study destination after viewing our Autumn campaign content, and 52% in the Spring phase of the campaign.
- Media coverage achieved an overall reach of over 17 million, and delivered an increase of positive sentiment amongst media outlets.

Over the lifetime of the campaign, the campaign hashtag achieved:



13,900 posts  
across  
5,149 users



644,330  
engagements



25,563,350  
reach



78,138,477  
impressions



**81%**  
of our members found  
our campaigns valuable  
or very valuable.



# 3

## Strategic Priority 3: To grow impactful transnational education supported by effective domestic regulation

The scale and profile of UK transnational education (TNE) continues to grow, as more universities look to expand their reach to learners around the globe. UUKi has played a key role this year in ensuring that the sector has the tools and resources necessary to achieve their strategic TNE ambitions in a secure and equitable way.

### This year, we have:

- Worked with the Group on Monitoring and Evaluation Tools in TNE to submit an official response to the HESA Aggregate Offshore Record (AOR) major review. Following the consultation, the timelines for the implementation of the review’s recommendations have been pushed back to the 2026-27 academic year, allowing the sector more time to make appropriate preparations for the additional data reporting requirements.
- Co-authored and published with the British Council a guide to Managing Risk and Developing Responsible TNE Partnerships. The report was warmly received by the sector, and formed the basis of a workshop on managing risks in TNE, attended by over 40 UK universities.
- Published an insight piece on how UK universities can build equitable TNE partnerships in Africa and the rest of the world. Responding to member interest and requests for further information, this useful resource is informed by interviews with UK and African HE experts and provides suggestions that universities may wish to consider when developing their TNE partnerships and strategies.
- Delivered the 2023 UUKi TNE Conference at London South Bank University, attended by 165 delegates from across the UK and featuring sessions on the Scale of TNE, risk and due diligence, and equitable partnerships.
- Continued the series of joint roundtables with Advance HE, exploring Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in TNE.
- Collaborated with the Quality Assurance Agency and GuildHE on the creation and publication of infographics to explain the regulatory and quality approaches in the four nations of the UK, as well as universities’ internal quality processes.
- Contributed to or facilitated high-level delegations to, and bilateral engagements with China, Cyprus, Philippines, Czechia, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Brazil, Uzbekistan, India, Nigeria, Germany, Greece, Australia, and others, reflecting the strong global appetite for UK TNE.



**90%**  
agree or strongly agree  
that UUKi supports  
its members in the  
development of sustainable  
and scalable transnational  
education (TNE).



# In focus:

## Key research, reports, and publications

### International Graduate Outcomes 2024

This report, published in collaboration with Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), sheds light on the experiences and achievements of over 10,000 international students who have graduated from 37 UK universities in the past six years.

The report explores the varied and significant paths of international graduates, as well as their career accomplishments and ongoing connections with the UK. The survey ran from 5 February to 18 March 2024 and represents a diverse cohort from 196 countries and territories.



### Key findings:

- Students are drawn to the UK by its high-quality universities and a great learning experience.
- 59% of the surveyed graduates chose to study in the UK due to the perceived high quality of its universities.
- The Graduate route visa provides a favourable learning and developmental environment for graduates and positive relationships with employers. 73% of surveyed graduates felt that the Graduate route visa met their expectations, reporting higher job satisfaction compared to those on other visa types.
- Through post-study work, international graduates add value to sectors that are vital to the UK economy. Graduates on the Graduate route visa contribute significantly to the UK economy, with many working in key sectors such as healthcare and education.
- Universities need to improve career support for international students with targeted schemes to meet their unique needs. Despite high satisfaction with their educational experience, 53% of surveyed graduates feel more could be done in terms of career support and professional placements.
- International graduates will continue to support the UK economy on returning home.
- 71% of surveyed graduates feel a lasting connection with the UK, and 57% are more likely to engage in business with the UK due to their educational experiences.

### Scale of TNE

This report is the seventh in a series produced by UUKi that analyses trends in UK higher education transnational education provision (HE TNE) by provider, location, type and level, using the latest data available. The report provides insight into the scale and scope of UK HE TNE across the globe, sheds light on new opportunities and, ultimately, supports the development of strategic, sustainable and secure TNE partnerships.

### Key highlights:

- UK HE transnational education is growing in all continents except Australasia.
- In 2021-22, 162 UK higher education providers reported 558,215 students learning via transnational education.
- There were UK TNE students in 230 countries and territories.
- More than half of all TNE students were from Asia (51.1%).
- Vietnam, India and Sri Lanka saw the biggest increases in TNE students, with growth rates of 39.7%, 39.5% and 27.4% respectively.
- China remains the top host country for UK TNE.
- Overall, UK TNE numbers have continued to grow (+9.3%).

### Developing equitable TNE partnerships

This insight piece sets out best practice in developing equitable partnerships which was put together through a range of interviews with participants from across UK universities, overseas universities and overseas HE organisations. It's intended to support the sector's efforts to build equitable TNE partnerships in Africa and the rest of the world.

### Managing risk and developing responsible transnational education (TNE) partnerships

This research offers guidance to UK universities on mitigating risk in transnational education (TNE). To help maximise the benefits that flow from our growing TNE offer, this report positions effective risk mitigation as a key enabler in developing responsible, secure and sustainable partnerships.

The report identifies six key areas that must be underpinned by an integrated approach to risk management:

- Financial risk
- Reputational risk
- Academic freedom and freedom of speech
- Security considerations
- Relationship and personnel management
- Cyber, intellectual property (IP) and data management

This report was jointly authored by UUKi and the British Council. It draws on sector advice and British Council expertise in developing sustainable partnerships, with a focus on managing risk holistically across a TNE partnership lifecycle. It shows that, while the risk that UK TNE providers encounter may be increasing in quantity and broadening in scope, there are practical steps universities can take to create partnerships built on trust and mutual understanding.

**98%**  
found our advice, analysis  
and intelligence valuable or  
very valuable.



# 4

## Strategic Priority 4:

### To increase the proportion of students with international experience, especially those from low participation backgrounds

Outward mobility can be a life-changing opportunity for students, and its benefits are tangible on a personal, academic and employability level. Additionally, Internationalisation at Home is an increasingly important vehicle to spread these benefits more widely and embed intercultural learning opportunities within the curriculum.

#### This year, we have:

- Undertaken extensive engagement with the Department for Education (DfE) in advance of the launch of the fourth funding round of UK Turing Scheme funding. We facilitated visits to member universities for staff from the DfE Turing policy and operational teams and provided advice directly and via the Turing Higher Education Stakeholder group in consultation with members.
- Helped drive improvements to the Turing Scheme. This included the in-housing of delivery by the DfE to improve the service to grant recipients, DfE's adoption of UUKi policy recommendations to protect the scope of organisational support funding, as well as the extension of eligibility for Turing grant funding to students undertaking placements at overseas campuses of UK universities.
- Delivered a sold-out Global Mobility conference featuring sessions on strategic approaches to student mobility, sustainability and Internationalisation at Home, with conference now becoming part of our annual events programme.
- Established a new visas working group under our Outward Student Mobility network to support engagement with the consulates on outbound student visa issues.
- Co-produced an Internationalisation at Home (IaH) Handbook in conjunction with our IaH working group to promote excellence and innovation in this area.
- Participated in key, UK profile-raising events, including the EAIE annual conference and Embassy Education conference, and bilateral events with Spain, France and Germany. In our regular engagement with the EU delegation to the United Kingdom we provided the UUK perspective on the changing context, and associated policy and funding priorities for staff and student mobility, and opportunities for ongoing cooperation.
- In January 2024, the DfE published their Year 1 evaluation of the Turing Scheme. The report found that universities successfully delivered 13,326 mobilities in the first year, and achieved very high levels of participant satisfaction. The vast majority – 92% - of higher education participants were satisfied with their placement abroad, with 70% being very satisfied. Furthermore, around two-thirds (63%) of participants felt the experience exceeded their expectations.



**This year, 187 students from 19 UK universities will benefit from the opportunity to undertake a research placement in Canada with financial support as part of the Canadian government's Mitacs Globalink research internships.**



# 5

## Strategic Priority 5:

To help UK universities to develop the capabilities, understanding and resilience to meet new challenges

The focus on security, risk and internationalisation has continued to remain a very high priority for government and for universities, while the global environment continues to be extremely difficult, with geopolitical tensions and conflict offering serious challenges for universities to navigate.

### This year, we have:

- Presented on UUKi's work to a UK-government workshop on research security with representatives from overseas governments.
- Hosted a high-level dialogue with university representative bodies from Australia, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, and the United States.
- Contributed to numerous roundtables on research security with European partners, including: the Academic Cooperation Association summit in Brussels; at the UK mission in Brussels; the ARMA-led UK-Denmark Research Security Meeting at the Danish Ministry of Science in Copenhagen; and at the European Universities Association annual conference.
- Co-developed and co-delivered a workshop on managing risk in TNE with the British Council.

- Security, risk and related issues have also been an important focus of our policy work. We have contributed to a number of high-level roundtables convened by DSIT to inform the development of strategic responses to research security.
- We have continued to liaise closely with the UK government on the proposed Foreign Influence Registration Scheme to help ensure that sector views and concerns are considered in its implementation, and provided extensive feedback on the OfS guidance on freedom of speech (May 2024) to highlight the potential challenges this posed for international partnerships.
- UUKi's work was also cited extensively in the parliamentary debates on the proposed Economic Activity of Public Bodies Overseas bill, where we called for an exemption for universities. Ultimately, the bill was withdrawn. [New guidance on cyber security](#) was published by Jisc in October 2023.
- We continue to support the development of sector-led initiatives such as the HE Export Controls Association.

96% agree or strongly agree that UUKi creates a network of colleagues for sharing good practice.

### Responding to humanitarian crisis

In September 2023 we published a report on [‘Responding to international humanitarian crises: Lessons from the UK higher education sector response to the invasion of Ukraine’](#) which we had commissioned Halpin Partnership to deliver. This report draws invaluable conclusions from the sector's work responding to the war in Ukraine.

The findings of the report have informed our response to the Israel-Gaza conflict. UUKi convened several extraordinary meetings of our PVC network and organised a roundtable with the Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA) to understand better how universities might be able to respond. We continue to provide forums for our members to discuss responses to the ongoing crisis and are actively soliciting offers of support from universities. This will continue to be an important area of work in 2024-25.

UUKi has an observer role on the sector-led UK HE Humanitarian Group.





# Our funders and sponsors

The work of UUKi is generously supported by universities, by our core grant funders, and through partnership and sponsorship from a wide range of commercial partners.

## Core grant funders

Our thanks go to our core grant funders, whose ongoing support ensures that we are able to continue acting as the authoritative voice on internationalisation for universities in all four nations of the UK.



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