INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN COLLEGE OF LONDON

Beyond Access

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE HIGHER EDUCATION PATHWAYS FOR UKRAINIAN STUDENTS IN THE UK

A WHITE PAPER

iHCL
International
Humanitarian
College of London

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Introduction

"Ukraine's future will not be rebuilt through formal compliance or administrative procedures, but through the quality of the learning experiences we create for our people – experiences grounded in trust, partnership, and the continuous development of human potential.

The British model of education, with its focus on autonomy, student-centred learning and genuine enhancement, offers a powerful foundation for this work. Yet for Ukrainians living in the UK today – displaced, resilient, and determined – access to such education remains uneven and often out of reach.

The International Humanitarian College of London stands at the forefront of changing this. By combining British educational excellence with Ukrainian lived experience, it provides the flexible, humane, and process-driven pathways which learners urgently need.

This white paper is a call to action: to build a new approachthat recognises Ukrainians not as passive recipients of support, but as partners in their own development and contributors to the future of both our nations."

General Valerii Zaluzhnyi, Ambassador of Ukraine to the United Kingdom & Northern Ireland , Chair, IHCL Advisory Board

"This white paper marks an important change in both tone and ambition. The conversation around Ukrainian learners in the UK can no longer be framed only as an emergency response. It must now be understood as part of a wider strategy for educational continuity, professional renewal, and national reconstruction. One of the most valuable aspects of this process has been the ability to bring together senior voices from Ukraine alongside leaders from the UK higher education and policy community, so that this discussion was shaped not only around Ukrainians, but with them.

As someone who has built institutions in both Ukraine and the UK, I see this challenge not simply in terms of access, but in terms of design. Ukrainian students and professionals are highly capable, ambitious, and resilient, yet too often they encounter systems that are not built for the realities of displacement, interrupted study, professional dislocation, and family responsibility. The gap we are dealing with is therefore not a gap of potential; it is a gap between human reality and institutional structure.

That is why partnership matters so much. Sustainable solutions will come from organisations able to work across cultures, sectors, and systems with credibility and trust. They will depend on closer collaboration between universities, government, specialist providers, and Ukrainian partners, and on models of learning that are flexible, humane, and rigorous enough to meet people where they are while helping them move forward with confidence.

My hope is that this paper helps move the discussion from sympathy to structure, and from goodwill to delivery. The relationships are emerging, the need is evident, and the opportunity is real. The task now is to build pathways that allow Ukrainian learners not only to access higher education in the UK, but to contribute fully to the future of both our countries."

Dr Serhii Kosianenko, Chief Executive Officer, International Humanitarian College of London

Introduction

"The work that underpins this white paper has been a stark reminder of educational challenges and a powerful testament to what is possible. Through research, sector engagement and the insights shared at our strategic roundtable, we have heard directly from Ukrainian learners, UK higher education colleagues, policymakers and international partners.Their experiences reveal both the extraordinary resilience of Ukrainians rebuilding their lives in the UK, and the deep commitment across our sector to support them. Yet they also expose a stark truth: despite goodwill, the current system reaches only a fraction of those who could benefit from higher education. The gap between aspiration and access remains unacceptably wide.

What has emerged most clearly is that the UK is at its best when it works collaboratively. Universities, regulators, government departments, and specialist providers have all played vital roles since the invasion of Ukraine. But the scale and complexity of the challenge now require a more coordinated, strategic and sustainable approach – one that recognises Ukrainians not as temporary guests, but as future colleagues, professionals and contributors to both the UK and Ukraine's reconstruction.

At International Humanitarian College of London, we have seen first–hand the transformative impact of culturally competent, flexible and human-centred education. The voices that shaped this work have been generous, honest, and forward-looking. Their contributions have grounded our analysis and strengthened our conviction that a new approach is both necessary and achievable. As the UK continues to navigate global uncertainty and humanitarian crises, the lessons learned here can help shape a more resilient, inclusive and internationally engaged higher education system.

My hope is that this white paper will stimulate meaningful action: deeper partnerships, more flexible provision, and a renewed commitment to widening participation. The opportunity before us is significant. With the right structures, the right collaborations and the right intent, we can ensure that Ukrainian learners are not left behind – but instead become central to the rebuilding of their nation and the enrichment of ours."

Dr Rod Brazier, Managing Director, International Humanitarian College of London

1.EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 triggered a profound displacement of people, including a large cohort of students, academics, and highly qualified professionals. The UK responded with bespoke visa schemes, home-fee status for higher education (HE), and a rapid mobilisation of institutional support. Yet, four years on, the data reveals a stark disjunction between **what the system offers** and **who is actually able to access and benefit from it.**

According to HESA data for the 2024/25 academic year, there were **1,845 Ukrainian students enrolled in UK higher education**: **1,425 undergraduates** and **420 postgraduates**. Against a resident Ukrainian population of approximately **227,000 (December 2024)**, this means **well under 1%** of Ukrainians in the UK are currently studying in UK HE. Even if we restrict the denominator to working-age and youth cohorts, the proportion remains strikingly low. Whilst the system is formally open, it is functionally inaccessible to most.

This white paper argues that the challenge is no longer one ofemergency humanitarian access, but rather one of **structural integration, cultural understanding, and pedagogic redesign**. It contends that:

- ·The **very small proportion** of Ukrainians in UK HE is not a reflection of low aspiration, but of systemic barriers – financial, linguistic, bureaucratic, psychological, and cultural.

- ·Universities, however well-intentioned, often lack the **deep cultural and experiential understanding** of Ukrainian displacement, war-related trauma, and visa precarity needed to design effective pathways.

- ·Specialist institutions such as the **International Humanitarian College of London (IHCL)** – with Ukrainian staff, lived experience of displacement, and a pedagogic model built for diverse, 'widening-participation'learners – are uniquely positioned to act as **bridge institutions.**

IHCL recently hosted a strategic roundtable as a precursor to this paper, with the task to explore "how flexible, inclusive, and experiential learning models can complement traditional higher education provision and enable wider access to learning opportunities". The question is no longer whether the sector cares, but whether it is structurally configured to deliver.

This paper proposes a set of **concrete, collaborative models** – language-integrated pathways to boost academic English capabilities, dual degrees, credit recognition hubs, flexible experiential delivery, and structured coaching/mentoring – alongside policy recommendations for universities, regulators, governments, Ukrainian partners, and industry. It posits that education should not merely be an adjunct to reconstruction, but **reconstruction infrastructure** itself.

2.CONTEXT AND DEMOGRAPHIC REALITY

2.1 UKRAINIAN ARRIVALS AND THE SCALE OF THE CHALLENGE

By December 2024, approximately **227,000 Ukrainians** were living in the UK under the Homes for Ukraine and related schemes. The demographic profile is distinctive:

- ·Around **70% of adult arrivals are women.**
- ·Approximately **27% of arrivals are under 18.**
- ·Many adults hold higher education qualifications and substantial professional experience

This is not a transient, low-skilled population. It is a **highly educated, gendered, and family-centred cohort,** whose trajectories will shape both UK society and Ukraine's eventual reconstruction.

2.2 LONG-TERM SETTLEMENT INTENTIONS

Survey data indicate that **around 68% of Ukrainians in the UK wish to remain long-term**, even when it becomes safe to return. This fundamentally reframes the policy question:

- The issue is **not** simply humanitarian sanctuary.
- It is a **medium– to long-term integration and workforce strategy**.

Education policy, therefore, cannot be limited to short-term scholarships or ad hoc support. It must be embedded in a **coherent, multi-year framework** that recognises Ukrainians as future colleagues, professionals, and citizens.

2.3 EMPLOYMENT, UNDEREMPLOYMENT, AND "BRAIN WASTE"

Employment rates among Ukrainian adults in the UK have reached circa **68%**, but this headline figure masks a deep problem of **underemployment**:

- Doctors working as care assistants.
- Engineers working in warehouses.
- Academics unable to re-enter research or teaching.
- Teachers unable to teach due to qualification and language barriers.

A vast majority are severely underemployed. Highly qualified professionals are taking lower-skilled roles due to unrecognised qualifications, lack of professional networks, and job centre pressures. This is not only a personal tragedy; it is a **strategic loss of human capital** for both the UK and Ukraine.

It should also be noted that the UK HE system does somewhat lack of awareness about the quality of the Ukrainian education system. Quality Assurance mechanisms are high within Ukrainian higher education and educational levels between the UK and Ukraine are comparable.

2.4 EDUCATION PARTICIPATION PATTERNS

It is important to highlight some complex educational behaviours:

- Some students attempt to continue Ukrainian degrees remotely from the UK, but "doing so disqualifies them from claiming Universal Credit, plunging them into financial hardship."
- Those who seek to enter UK HE face unfamiliar admissions systems, documentation barriers, and a different academic culture.
- Working parents, especially single mothers – who account for a high proportion of those who fled to the UK under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, find traditional full-time models impossible to reconcile with childcare and precarious employment.

The result is a **structural mismatch**: a system designed for stable, campus-based, full-time students is being asked to serve a population living with **trauma, time poverty, visa anxiety, and financial precarity**.

3. THE NUMBERS: HOW FEW UKRAINIANS ARE IN UK HIGHER EDUCATION

HESA data from the academic year 2024/25 gives an important overview of Ukrainian participation in UK HE.

3.1 HEADLINE FIGURES

Total Ukrainian students in UK HE (2024/25): 1,845

- **Undergraduate: 1,425**
- **Postgraduate: 420**

Set against a Ukrainian resident population of ~227,000 in the UK (as of December 2024 – this has increased, since), this means:

- Fewer than 1 in 100 Ukrainians in the UK are currently enrolled in UK higher education.
- Even if we conservatively assume that only half the population is of HE-relevant age, the participation rate remains well below 2%.

This is a critical finding. The sector often highlights its scholarships, sanctuary status, and support schemes – but the **actual reach** into the Ukrainian community is extremely limited.

3.2 DISTRIBUTION ACROSS INSTITUTIONS

The data also show that Ukrainian students are **highly concentrated** in a relatively small number of institutions:

The largest cohorts are found at research-intensive and metropolitan universities:

- The University of Glasgow (70 total)
- University of Greenwich (60)
- University of the Arts London (60)
- Queen Mary University of London (60)
- City/St George's (55)
- Edinburgh Napier (55)
- University College London (55) and others in the 35 – 50 range

A significant cluster is visible in **Scottish institutions**, with **330** of the **1,845 students** – around **18%** – studying in Scotland.

The long tail of the dataset is striking: **dozens of institutions report zero Ukrainian students**, and many more report fiveor fewer. This suggests that, in practice, **only a small subset of universities have developed meaningful Ukrainian engagement**, while the majority have little or no direct experience.

3.3 IMPLICATIONS

These numbers force a difficult but necessary conclusion:

- The **formal openness** of UK HE to Ukrainians has not translated into **broad-based participation.**
- **The barriers identified qualitatively – documentation, language, finance, visa instability, cultural unfamiliarity – are impacting on the number of Ukrainians attending higher education.**
- Without structural change, the sector will continue to serve only a small,self-selecting minority of Ukrainians who are already relatively advantaged (linguistically, financially, or in terms of networks).

This is precisely why the roundtable convened by IHCL focused on "widening participation for displaced and disrupted learners" and "skills development for reconstruction." The challenge is not to add another scholarship scheme, but to **rethink the architecture of access and progression.**

4.LIVED EXPERIENCE: THREE LEARNER PROFILES

To avoid treating Ukrainians as an abstract category, we anchor this analysis in three composite profiles drawn from research, sector testimony, and IHCL's direct experience.

4.1 THE SENIOR ACADEMIC - QUALIFICATION MISMATCH AND LOSS OF STATUS

Formerly a dean or professor in Ukraine, this individual arrives in the UK with a PhD, publications, and decades of leadership experience. Yet:

- ·Their qualifications are poorly understood by employers.
- ·They lack UK professional networks.
- ·They are unfamiliar with UK research funding and governance structures.
- ·They face language barriers in academic writing and grant applications.

They find themselves applying for entry-level roles, often outside their field. Such individuals possess immense intellectual capital but require strategic mentoring and bridging programmes to rebuild their career to its former height. Without targeted pathways, the system effectively **wastes a lifetime of expertise.**

4.2 THE INTERRUPTED UNDERGRADUATE - VERIFICATION BARRIERS AND STALLED PROGRESSION

A 19-year-old student fled a region under occupation. Their university archives were damaged; physical transcripts were left behind. However, in the UK:

- ·Admissions teams often ask for documents that no longer exist.
- ·ENIC processes are complex and costly.
- ·There is no centralised mechanism to verify partial study or award credit for prior learning.

The result is paralysis: the student cannot prove what they have already achieved and is often advised to **start again from the beginning**. This is demoralising, financially inefficient, and strategically short-sighted.

4.3 THE WORKING PARENT - TIME POVERTY, TRAUMA, AND INFLEXIBLE PROVISION

A single mother, with her partner still in Ukraine, responsible for children, navigating precarious housing and low-paid work. She is exactly the kind of learner who could benefit from upskilling or reskilling, yet:

- ·Traditional 9–5, Monday to Friday, campus-based study is impossible.
- ·Evening classes clash with childcare and shift work.
- ·Long, passive lectures are cognitively and emotionally exhausting in the context of trauma and chronic stress.
- ·Assessment formats (long essays, timed exams) amplify anxiety.

Traditional full-time university models are entirely inaccessible to her due to extreme time poverty and a lack of flexible, part-time, or remote learning options.

These profiles are not marginal exceptions; they are representative of the structural misalignment between the current HE model and the realities of displaced learners.

5. STRUCTURAL BARRIERS: SYSTEMIC, NOT INDIVIDUAL

5.1 QUALIFICATION RECOGNITION GAPS

The UK ENIC system provides a "Statement of Comparability", but:

- Fees are prohibitive for those in poverty.
- Discretionary processes for missing documents are not widely understood.
- Institutions often err on the side of caution, requiring repetition of study rather than recognising prior learning.

This often results in students having to repeat educational levels rather than converting their existing credits. This is inefficient for the system and unjust for the learner.

5.2 ADMINISTRATIVE AND DOCUMENTATION CHALLENGES

Admissions teams are not routinely trained in:

- Handling incomplete or destroyed records.
- Using alternative evidence (e.g. sworn statements, employer references, digital traces).
- Communicating clearly with applicants whose first language is not English.

Language barriers at the admissions stage can be decisive. A single confusing email or misunderstood deadline can end an application. These are **process failures**, not failures of motivation.

5.3 PEDAGOGICAL RIGIDITY

The dominant UK HE model assumes:

- Full-time or near full-time availability.
- Regular campus attendance.
- High tolerance for long, lecture-based delivery.
- Comfort with essay- and exam-based assessment.

For learners living with PTSD, grief, and ongoing anxiety about family in a war zone, this model is often unworkable. PTSD and grief make long–form passive lectures difficult and cultural expectations of teaching can alienate Ukrainian students used to different forms of engagement.

5.4 LANGUAGE AND ACADEMIC ENGLISH GAP

While conversational English is relatively strong amongst Ukrainians, **academic English** – the language of essays, dissertations, and professional communication – remains a barrier. **37% of Ukrainian adults** report needing more support with formal/academic English.

Crucially, language support is often **sequential** (ESOL first, then academic study), which delays progression and increases dropout risk. It is rarely **integrated** into disciplinary learning.

5.5 FINANCIAL AND VISA INSTABILITY

Visa extension policies have created **8-week** gaps during which time the proof – that individuals have the right to work or rent – is not accepted by all entities in the way that it legally should be. Media reports and parliamentary evidence document cases of Ukrainians losing jobs and facing homelessness due to administrative delays and confusion.

6. SECTOR STRENGTHS AND THE LIMITS OF GOOD INTENTIONS

It is important to recognise that the UK HE sector has not been passive. On the contrary, it has shown **real compassion and creativity:**

- Universities of Sanctuary and sanctuary scholarships.
- Trauma-informed teaching initiatives.
- Home-fee status and access to student finance.
- OfS hardship funding.
- The UK–Ukraine Twinning Initiative – through exemplary work of CCG (Cormack Consultancy Group), with over 100 partnerships.
- The "Researchers at Risk" scheme protecting academic capital.

However, critical questions must be posed for the higher education sector:

- Who is going to build it?
- Who is going to teach it?
- Who can offer the pastoral support?
- Who handles the admissions complexity?

The default institutional response is often "we'd love to help, but we can't take on anything new" – and this isunderstandable in a context of financial pressure, resource allocation, and regulatory scrutiny. But it leaves a gap between **aspiration and implementation.**

The HESA data shows that, despite all this goodwill, **only 1,845 Ukrainians** are currently in UK HE. The sector's efforts, while laudable, are **not yet structurally transformative.**

7. VOICES FROM THE SECTOR

The strategic roundtable held by IHCL on February 27th 2026 brought together a wide range of voices from both the UK and Ukrainian education sectors. Some of the notable comments and contributions were captured and synthesised below:

"The Prime Minister gives his unwavering support for the people of Ukraine and is in close contact with international partners, including the Coalition of the Willing. The Prime Minister has repeatedly reaffirmed the UK's steadfast support for a just and lasting peace, which fully upholds Ukraine's sovereignty and security."

SIR KEIR STARMER (ON BEHALF OF),
PRIME MINISTER, UK

"Education remains not only a fundamental human right, but also a strategic pillar of democratic stability, social cohesion, and sustainable reconstruction. Ensuring uninterrupted access to high-quality education for Ukrainian learners who have been displaced or are pursuing their studies abroad is an essential component of strengthening our nations' resilience and future capacity"

RUSLAN STEFANCHUK, SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL
PARLIAMENT OF UKRAINE - VERKHOVNA RADA

"Flexible and inclusive education is a matter of continuity and resilience. It supports learners whose lives and study pathways have been disrupted by the war, including those who are displaced, studying abroad, or rebuilding their professional trajectories. When access to quality learning remains open, people retain agency, develop skills, and stay connected to communities and institutions that will be central to recovery and reconstruction. I also welcome the practical orientation of the roundtable and the emphasis on concrete cooperation between higher education institutions and policymakers."

MYKOLA TROFYMENKO, DEPUTY MINISTER OF EDUCATION
AND SCIENCE OF UKRAINE

"Education has long been one of my deepest commitments, and I strongly believe in the power of international academic collaboration to strengthen societies and create opportunity. I look forward to supporting IHCL's leadership and wider community, as the College advances its mission to educate and inspire the next generation of citizens and leaders."

GENERAL ZALUZHNYI, AMBASSADOR FOR UKRAINE TO UNITED KINGDOM AND NORTHERN IRELAND AND CHAIR OF IHCL ADVISORY BOARD

The strategic roundtable also benefited from contributions by senior sector leaders whose insights reinforced the structural arguments advanced in this paper.

Professor Joanna Newman MBE, Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, SOAS, emphasised the significant potential of the UK's Lifelong Learning Entitlement to widen access for displaced learners, noting that flexible, modular study routes could be transformative for Ukrainians seeking to rebuild their educational trajectories.

Professor Dibyesh Anand, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement and Employability) at the University of Westminster, highlighted the constraining effect of current anti-migration political narratives on admissions processes and support for international students, warning that such pressures risk closing the very "doors" that Ukrainians and others facing wars need to access higher education. He also stressed that Ukrainian students, once admitted, demonstrate strong academic performance – positively influencing institutional B3 metrics and evidencing their high potential

Lucy Arnold-Courtney, Interim Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Educational Partnerships), Bath Spa University,underscored the growing strategic importance of micro-credentials in reducing cognitive and logistical overload for learners balancing study with work and family responsibilities, arguing that short, stackable learning offers a vital route for displaced students.

Vicki Stott, Chief Executive of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), drew attention to the persistent misconception that UK and Ukrainian academic standards differ, emphasising that in reality the two systems are far more closely aligned than is often assumed. She noted that both countries operate within European quality frameworks grounded in transparency, academic integrity and continuous enhancement, and that this shared foundation creates a strong basis for deeper collaboration. In her view, dual-degree programmes and jointly delivered curricula are not only feasible but particularly well-suited to the current moment, offering a credible mechanism to maintain academic continuity for Ukrainian students while strengthening institutional partnerships across borders.

Dr Charles Knight, Director of Educational Excellence at Advance HE, stressed that meaningful widening participation depends on intentional course design that reflects the realities of learners from displaced, multilingual and non-traditional backgrounds. He argued that UK institutions must actively shape programmes with these students in mind, rather than expecting them to adapt to existing structures. Dr Knight also emphasised that supporting Ukrainian students – and their home institutions – requires genuine collaboration between providers, reinforcing the central premise of this white paper: that partnership, not isolated effort, is the only sustainable route to equitable access.

Dr Vicky Greenaway, Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Inclusive Learning & Teaching), Royal Holloway, emphasised that twinning and transnational collaboration can be strengthened through structured partnerships and CPD-based engagement with industry, creating more resilient and practice-aligned pathways for Ukrainian learners.

Professor Anthony Moss, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) at London South Bank University, reiterated the centrality of widening participation, noting that mature learners, carers, and those with English as a second language can only be effectively supported through deep collaboration between providers – precisely the type of partnership model advocated throughout this white paper.

Finally, **Professor Sally Wheeler OBE, Vice-Chancellor of Birkbeck, University of London**, stressed the need for a geographically mapped list of flexible provision – flexible in both delivery mode and qualification entry routes – to ensure Ukrainian learners can access opportunities where they actually live. She also highlighted the importance of understanding the geographic distribution of Ukrainian nationals across the UK, noting that some regions have proven more welcoming and therefore require targeted provision.

Her reflections underscore the necessity of place-based strategy, flexible admissions, and cross-provider collaboration, including potential engagement with institutions who have experience of delivering successfully.

Collectively, these expert perspectives reinforce the need for flexible, culturally competent, partnership-driven solutions that move beyond emergency support and towards sustainable, system-level integration.

8.IHCL'S UNIQUE POSITIONING: CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND ADAPTIVE PEDAGOGY

This is where IHCL's offering becomes strategically significant.

8.1 CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

IHCL is not a generic provider. It is an institution:

- ·With **Ukrainian staff who speak the language.**
- ·With staff who have themselves navigated **immigration, employment precarity, and qualification recognition** in the UK.
- ·With direct, ongoing relationships with Ukrainian universities, ministries, and civic organisations.

This gives IHCL a **depth of cultural understanding** that most UK universities cannot easily replicate. It can interpret not only language, but context: the psychological impact of war, the social dynamics of displacement, the nuances of Ukrainian academic culture.

A statement, submitted to the strategic roundtable event, from **Ruslan Stefanchuk, the Speaker of the National Parliament of Ukraine** – Verkhovna Rada, notes that IHCL's initiatives can "*help build strong and lasting connections between Ukrainian and international academic communities*" and that their work is "*particularly valuable when developed in close partnership with universities, research centres, and educational organisations across borders.*" **This is a rare parliamentary endorsement of a UK provider's bridging role.**

8.2 A PEDAGOGIC MODEL DESIGNED FOR WIDENING PARTICIPATION

IHCL's **Adaptive Chunked Experiential Learning (ACEL)** model is explicitly designed for:

- ·Mature students.
- ·Returners to education.
- ·Learners who do not speak English as a first language.
- ·Neurodivergent learners and those with disrupted educational histories.

The ACEL model breaks each module into six predictable weekly "chunks":

1. **Learning Toolbox** – building capacity and executive function before content.
2. **Expert Input** – short, curated, cognitively manageable content.
3. **Experiential Challenge** – applied, real-world tasks.
4. **Checkpoint** – low-stakes, authentic assessment.
5. **Feedback Corner** – weekly, personalised, feed-forward guidance.
6. **Thinking Space** – structured reflection and integration.

Every week, every module, students undertake the same six–step rhythm. This predictability allows students to focus on their learning in a manageable way, and the structure creates safety. This is precisely what displaced learners need: **predictability, structure, and human connection**

8.3 THE HUMAN SAFETY NET

IHCL's model also embeds a "**Human Safety Net**" whereby each student has both an academic coach and a **professional mentor**. This dual-support structure:

- Guides study skills, wellbeing, and academic progress.
- Bridges the gap between abstract theory and workplace realities.
- Ensures that no student falls behind due to life pressures.

For Ukrainians navigating trauma, precarious work, and family responsibilities, this is not a luxury; it is a **precondition for sustained engagement.**

In short, IHCL combines **cultural competence, lived experience, and a purpose-built pedagogy**. It is therefore uniquely positioned to act as a **specialist partner and delivery engin**e within a broader UK – Ukraine HE framework.

9. STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS AND COLLABORATIVE MODELS

A range of solutions are available to aid Ukranians in the UK who might be seeking to study at higher education levels. This paper has outlined an initial five strategic models, each framed in terms of the problem addressed, the practical model, and implementation considerations.

9.1 LANGUAGE-INTEGRATED FOUNDATION PATHWAYS

Problem addressed: The gap between conversational English and academic English is a major barrier. Sequential ESOL followed by academic study delays progression and increases dropout risk.

Practical model: Develop **language-integrated foundation years** in which:

- ESOL and Academic English are embedded within disciplinary modules – notably at levels 3/4.
- Assessment allows demonstration of subject mastery even as language develops.
- Ukrainian-speaking student support staff and coaches aid comprehension and confidence.

Implementation considerations

- Co-badged qualifications (e.g. CertHE) to ensure progression routes.
- Flexible delivery (evenings, weekends, online) for working parents.

Funding models that combine student finance, institutional bursaries, and philanthropic support

9.2 DUAL / TWINNING DEGREE STRUCTURES

Problem addressed: Brain drain and the disconnect between UK and Ukrainian HE systems. Students risk losing connection to their home institutions and future reconstruction roles.

Practical model: Expand existing twinning arrangements into **formal dual degrees:**

- Shared curricula and learning outcomes.
- Joint supervision and assessment.
- Mobility options (physical, virtual, or hybrid).·
- Recognition of credits in both systems.

Implementation considerations

- Quality assurance alignment between UK and Ukrainian frameworks.
- Digital infrastructure for joint delivery.
- Clear communication to students about recognition and progression.

9.3 CREDIT ACCELERATOR AND RECOGNITION HUBS

Problem addressed: Lost transcripts, costly ENIC processes, and inconsistent recognition of prior learning.

Practical model: Create a **national** or **regional** "Credit Accelerator Hub" that:

- Works with UK ENIC to secure **fee waivers** and **fast-track evaluations** for displaced learners.
- Develops **competency-based assessment** tools to evidence prior learning when documents are missing.
- Provides authoritative guidance to admissions teams across the sector.

Implementation considerations

- Governance structure to ensure trust and consistency.
- Data-sharing agreements with Ukrainian institutions where possible.
- Integration with UCAS and institutional admissions systems.

9.4 FLEXIBLE AND EXPERIENTIAL DELIVERY MODELS

Problem addressed: Time poverty, trauma, and the incompatibility of traditional full-time models with the lives of displaced learners.

Practical model: Scale up **adaptive, modular, competency-based programmes** using models like ACEL:

- Short, stackable modules that can be combined into certificates, diplomas, and degrees.
- Experiential learning (live briefs, simulations, projects) that builds both skills and confidence.
- Multiple – and where possible a choice of – assessment modes (authentic, presentations, vivas, slide decks, portfolios, written briefs) to reduce test anxiety and language barriers.

Implementation considerations

- Clear progression pathways from micro-credentials to full degrees.
- Robust evaluation of outcomes (retention, progression, employment).

9.5 ACADEMIC COACHING AND MENTORSHIP STRUCTURES

Problem addressed: Underemployment, loss of professional networks, and the psychological toll of displacement.

Practical model: Establish **structured coaching and mentoring schemes**:

- Academic coaches support study skills, time management, and wellbeing.
- Professional mentors (from industry) help rebuild networks and career trajectories.
- Group mentoring for peer support and community building.

Implementation considerations

- Training and safeguarding for mentors.
- Matching systems that consider language, sector, and personal circumstances.
- Integration with careers services and employability programmes.

10. POLICY AND PARTNERSHIP RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 FOR UK UNIVERSITIES

- **Acknowledge the participation gap**: use HESA data to benchmark Ukrainian enrolment and set realistic, time-bound improvement targets.
- **Partner with specialist providers** like IHCL to deliver flexible, culturally competent programmes rather than trying to build everything in-house.
- **Adopt integrated language and foundation models**, especially in disciplines aligned with skills shortages (such as healthcare, digital, AI, engineering, education).
- **Train admissions teams** in displaced-learner processes and alternative evidence.
- **Embed trauma-informed pedagogy** and flexible assessment methods across relevant programmes.

10.2 FOR UKRAINIAN UNIVERSITIES

- **Strengthen digital credentialing** to mitigate the loss of physical transcripts.
- **Co-design dual degrees and credit-transfer frameworks** with UK partners.
- **Collaborate on remote and hybrid connections**, ensuring that students in the UK remain connected to Ukrainian academic life and future reconstruction roles.

10.3 FOR REGULATORS

- Issue **clear guidance** on admissions for displaced learners, including acceptable alternative evidence.
- Support the creation of **recognition hubs** and competency-based assessment frameworks.
- Use regulatory levers to **incentivise flexible, inclusive provision, particularly where it aligns with national skills priorities.**

10.4 FOR UK GOVERNMENT

- Address **visa renewal gaps** that cause job loss and homelessness; ensure continuity of right-to-work and right-to-rent documentation.
- Consider a **pathway to permanent residency** for Ukrainians who have integrated into education and the workforce.
- Fund **pilot programmes** for language-integrated pathways, credit hubs, and flexible delivery models, with rigorous evaluation.

10.5 FOR PRIVATE/ALTERNATIVE PROVIDERS

- Offer **agile, industry-aligned modules** that can be embedded into university programmes.
- Work with universities and IHCL to create **co-badged qualifications** that combine academic and vocational strengths.

10.6 FOR INDUSTRY PARTNERS

- Provide **mentorship, placements, and employment pathways** for Ukrainian learners.
- Recognise Ukrainian qualifications and experience more consistently, using guidance from recognition hubs.
- Co-design curricula that align with real workforce needs in sectors critical to both UK and Ukrainian reconstruction.

11. IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS

To convert this framework into action, we propose:

1.**Formation of a UK–Ukraine Higher Education Working Group**, with representation from universities, IHCL, regulators, Ukrainian institutions, and student voices.

2.**Design and launch educational pilots in partnership with IHCL within the next 12 months:**

    a. A language-integrated foundation pathway in partnership with one or more universities.
    b. A dual-degree pilot between a UK university, a Ukrainian university, and IHCL.
    c. Master's degree validation and short course collaborations

3.**Securing funding** from a mix of government, philanthropic, and industry sources, with clear outcome metrics.

4.**Systematic dissemination** of learning through sector bodies (UUK, GuildHE, Advance HE) and parliamentary briefings.

12. CONCLUSION: EDUCATION AS RECONSTRUCTION INFRASTRUCTURE

Supporting Ukrainian students in the UK is not an act of benevolence at the margins of policy. It is:

- **Workforce development** for a country facing acute skills shortages.
- **Knowledge preservation** for a nation under attack.
- **Reconstruction planning**, as today's students become tomorrow's engineers, doctors, teachers, and civil servants.
- **Bilateral academic cooperation** that strengthens democratic resilience on both sides.

The current system, despite its many strengths, reaches only a tiny **fraction** of Ukrainians in the UK. The gap between **what is possible** and what is **happening** is wide – but it is bridgeable.

Institutions like IHCL, with Ukrainian staff, lived experience of displacement, and a pedagogy built for diverse, widening-participation learners, offer a **practical route forward**. By partnering strategically, rethinking pedagogy, and addressing structural barriers, the UK can move **beyond access** to build sustainable, dignified, and future-oriented pathways from **displacement to contribution**.

To support the development of appropriate learning opportunities for Ukrainians living in the UK, International Humanitarian College of London is proud to announce that **General Dr. Valerii Zaluzhnyi**, Ambassador of Ukraine to the United Kingdom & Northern Ireland, has joined as Chair of the IHCL Advisory Board.

General Zaluzhnyi is internationally recognised for his leadership, strategic expertise, and service to Ukraine's defence and resilience. In his new role, he will work closely with IHCL's Leadership Team to strengthen the College's global humanitarian mission and guide the development of resilience-focused education – notably for those Ukrainian people in the UK and those displaced through the conflict.

A further and significant step toward delivering the ambitions set out in this white paper is the newly signed Memorandum of Understanding between IHCL and **UA EDUHUB**, one of Ukraine's largest educational support networks for displaced learners.

UA EDUHUB's community of more than **17,000 Ukrainians** provides an unparalleled channel for reaching those living in the UK who are seeking opportunities to study, retrain or rebuild their professional lives. Their mission – to offer accessible learning, skills development and pathways to employment for Ukrainians wherever they are – aligns directly with IHCL's commitment to culturally competent, flexible and human-centred higher education.

Through this partnership, IHCL and UA EDUHUB will be able to connect Ukrainian nationals with tailored guidance, academic pathways and support structures at scale, ensuring that learners who might otherwise remain invisible to the UK system are actively engaged and empowered. This collaboration exemplifies the central message of this white paper: that partnership, not isolated effort, is the key to widening **participation and building sustainable educational futures for Ukrainians in the UK.**

The UK has an opportunity – and responsibility – to build a system that transforms displacement into contribution. With coordinated action, flexible models, and sustained partnership, the sector can ensure that Ukrainian learners are not left behind, but instead become central to the rebuilding of their nation and the enrichment of the UK's academic and economic landscape.

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DESK REVIEW

A broad initial desk review was undertaken to review publicly available documentation relating to the UK and Ukrainian higher education sectors, including:

- Higher education in Ukraine, UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (2006)
- Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine website
- Draft Ukraine Recovery Plan (Materials of the education and science working group)
- Media coverage of the war in Ukraine and of higher education media coverage in relation to the conflict.
- Lessons from the UK higher education sector response to the invasion of Ukraine, UUKI & Halpin
- Publicly available information and documentation provided by partner organisations.
- Documentation provided by partner organisations, media reports and HESA data, including information from those leading elements of the sector response.

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