

**INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN  
COLLEGE OF LONDON**

# Beyond Access

---

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE HIGHER  
EDUCATION PATHWAYS FOR  
UKRAINIAN STUDENTS IN THE UK

WHITE PAPER - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# A Participation Gap the UK Can No Longer Ignore

More than 227,000 Ukrainians now live in the UK. Yet only 1,845 are enrolled in UK higher education (2024/25). That is less than 1% of the Ukrainian population in the UK.

Even when considering only HE-age cohorts, participation remains well below 2%. Dozens of universities report zero Ukrainian students; many more report five or fewer.

This is not because universities or Ukrainian nationals are not aspirational, but rather due to system design. The current HE model – built for stability, predictability, and full-time availability – cannot meet the needs of a population living with displacement, trauma, visa precarity, financial instability, and caring responsibilities.

## Who Are the Ukrainians in the UK?

A demographic with enormous potential:

- **Highly educated** – many with degrees and professional experience
- **Predominantly female** – 70% of adult arrivals
- **Young** – 27% under 18
- **Long-term** – 68% intend to remain in the UK

This is a future workforce, a future academic community, and a future bridge between the UK and Ukraine's reconstruction.

## Lived Experience Behind the Data

Three recurring profiles illustrate the structural mismatch:

- **The Senior Academic** – highly qualified, but unable to re-enter their field due to qualification mismatch and lack of networks.
- **The Interrupted Undergraduate** – transcripts lost or destroyed; unable to prove prior learning.
- **The Working Parent** – often a single mother balancing childcare, trauma, and precarious work; traditional 9–5 study is impossible.

These are not exceptions – they are representative of those Ukrainian nationals who reside in the UK.

## Five Structural Barriers Blocking Progress

- **Qualification recognition gaps** – ENIC fees, lost documents, inconsistent recognition
- **Administrative complexity** – admissions teams lack displaced-learner guidance
- **Pedagogical rigidity** – long lectures, fixed timetables, essay-heavy assessment
- **Language & academic English gaps** – 37% need more support
- **Visa & financial instability** – 8-week gaps in right-to-work documentation can cause job loss and homelessness

The sector's compassion is real – but compassion alone cannot dismantle structural barriers.

# Sector Voices Underscore the Urgency at the IHCL Strategic Roundtable

- The UK Prime Minister reaffirmed the UK’s “unwavering support for the people of Ukraine.”
- The Speaker of the Ukrainian Parliament described education as “a strategic pillar of democratic stability and reconstruction.”
- The Ukrainian Deputy Minister of Education stressed that flexible, inclusive learning “preserves agency, skills, and connection.”
- General Zaluzhnyi, Ambassador for Ukraine to the UK and IHCL Advisory Board Chair, emphasised the power of international academic collaboration.

The message is consistent: **education is reconstruction infrastructure.**

## IHCL: A Bridge Institution for the Sector

IHCL enables universities to widen participation without increasing internal workload. It brings:

- Ukrainian staff and Ukrainian-speaking mentors amongst its employees
- Lived experience of displacement and visa challenges
- Deep cultural and contextual understanding
- A purpose-built pedagogy (ACEL – Adaptive Chunked Experiential Learning) for multilingual, neurodivergent, mature, and trauma-affected learners
- A human-centred support model with academic coaches and professional mentors
- Ready-to-deploy partnership models that complement, not replace, university provision

IHCL provides the expertise and flexible delivery which universities cannot easily build internally.

## Five Practical, Scalable Solutions

- Language-Integrated Foundation Pathways -academic English embedded within disciplinary study
- Dual / Twinning Degrees - preserving academic continuity and supporting reconstruction
- Credit Recognition Hubs - centralised verification and prior learning recognition
- Flexible Experiential Learning (ACEL) - modular, competency-based, trauma-informed pathways
- Coaching & Mentorship Structures - rebuilding confidence, networks, and employability

These models align with UK workforce needs in addition to the reconstruction of Ukraine.

## A Clear Call to Action for Universities

To turn ambition into impact, universities can take three immediate steps:

- 1.Partner with IHCL to deliver flexible, culturally competent pathways without increasing internal workload.
- 2.Join the UK–Ukraine Higher Education Working Group to shape national strategy.
- 3.Collaborate on pilot programmes such as language-integrated pathways, dual degrees and master’s degrees, and short courses.

# INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN COLLEGE OF LONDON

**IN THE FULL WHITE PAPER WE GO ON TO EXPLORE THESE MATTERS IN GREATER DEPTH.  
YOU CAN ACCESS THE PAPER HERE:**

<https://ihcl.org.uk/news/a-white-paper-building-sustainable-higher-education-pathways-for-ukrainian-students-in-the-uk>



167 Queensway, London, United Kingdom