

The logo for Halpin, featuring the name in a white serif font on a dark blue background.The logo for UK International Universities, featuring a stylized white figure and the text "UK International Universities" in a white sans-serif font.

Responding to International Humanitarian Crises

**Lessons From the UK Higher Education Sector
Response to the Invasion of Ukraine**

August 2023

Summary Report

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Foreword



This research has been both humbling and uplifting. The findings showcase both the remarkable and inspiring resilience of our Ukrainian colleagues and the incredible efforts of UK higher education colleagues and partners.

Of course, this has not always been easy – the sector has had to navigate a changing policy landscape and consider its own financial constraints. However, one element is consistent: that the UK sector is at its best when it is collaborative.

We are incredibly grateful for the contributions of all colleagues to this report, via interviews, case studies, and focus groups. The voices of those at the forefront of the response have driven our analysis. The inclusion of voices from the Ukrainian sector has been our priority and we thank our Ukrainian colleagues who have volunteered their insights so humbly and generously during what is an unimaginable time for many.

As we look to the future, we hope that the lessons learned from the sector's response to the war in Ukraine will ensure that the UK's higher education sector is best placed to respond to other crises in other contexts.

The research demonstrates that the sector's responses are most fruitful when they are coordinated, sustainable, and locally situated. We hope that this report stimulates a new conversation on how we build such factors into our future responses across the UK.

Susie Hills

Halpin Partnership

1. Following the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, there was an unprecedented response from the UK higher education sector, funders, and government to provide support for colleagues, students and institutions affected by the war.
2. Within weeks of the invasion, and coordinated through Universities UK (UUK), a group of sector leaders and sector partners had come together to respond in unity. This included the support of Cormack Consultancy Group (CCG) and the inception of the UK-Ukraine Twinning Initiative. CCG reached out to colleagues in Ukraine ensuring that, in so far as possible, the capacity and capability needs of the Ukrainian sector led these activities. Some initial cautious responses by universities were caused by underlying concerns over sector funding and the five-year financial partnership commitment, but these reactions served to demonstrate how seriously universities have taken their obligations and commitments to Ukrainian partners. Given this, the continued engagement in the scheme is an endorsement for twinning, with some who were originally cautious now looking to join. It is clear that this is the first coordinated, planned and resourced response to a humanitarian crisis from the higher education sector of its kind in the UK. The rich case studies included in the report show benefits to both Ukrainian and UK universities well beyond any financial considerations.
3. The response has been underpinned by a policy and regulatory environment that is largely supportive of the needs of institutions in Ukraine, through a range of both funded and unfunded initiatives.
4. Three factors: coordination, a favourable policy environment, and the availability of funding, differentiate this response.
5. This report was commissioned in April 2023, as a 'lessons learnt' exercise. Over a year into the ongoing war in Ukraine, it is intended to stimulate thinking and inform planning and decision-making for key communities, including university leaders, members of the academic community, higher education professionals, policymakers and funders, and other stakeholders, such as third sector organisations.
6. This study analyses the UK higher education sector response to the invasion of Ukraine to:



Key lessons learnt

9. In

Analysis should be undertaken at institutional and sector level in order to understand the unique situations and complexities of each humanitarian situation. This analysis should include an understanding of the political, social, and cultural context, as well as an understanding of the higher education sector of the host country.

A transparent and open discussion of



17. Drawing on existing alliances, the scheme is supported by the Academy of Medical Sciences,

22. Local infrastructure and policy were seen as sometimes limiting the potential of scholarship schemes. Access to housing and other resettlement support, including school places for dependants, had sometimes been challenging. This is particularly evident in current structural issues in UK regions and emphasizes the importance of considering the local context of the host country in any given time of crisis. This includes current housing shortages which places further pressure on local authorities tasked with hosting refugee families and is particularly challenging when the university purpose is considered. In providing an educational route to refuge, the student may be hosted but with no extra capacity available to also host the student's family. This is exacerbated by the lack of policy support, such as the inability of universities to host larger groups of refugees under the proposed second phase of the Homes for Ukraine scheme.
23. Where scholarship schemes and hosting opportunities have been vast and abundant, recipient numbers are understandably low, and places oversubscribed. In some cases, academic standards have also been a challenge. It was noted during some interviews that there is a lack of alignment of academic abilities between UK and Ukrainian students undertaking equivalent programmes of learning. This creates difficulties in navigating curriculum content in the UK.



36. A number of interview participants also talked about the changing nature of support required of their twin, noting how support had changed over time and in response to increasing destruction of infrastructure. Recent support was closer to direct aid, than to educational purpose.
37. There are key questions in relation to the charitable purpose of universities and to whether aid provided by way of donation (cash or other resources) is within the charitable objects of the institution. Charities Commission 2022 advice in relation to support to Ukraine states:

should first consider whether your charity's existing charitable objects allow you to help. These are set out in your charity's governing document."

38. It is a legal responsibility of governors to act within the charitable objects of their university whether they are an exempt or non-exempt charity. Section 12 of the Office for Students¹, 'Regulatory advice 5: Exempt Charities' draws the attention of universities in England to obligations in relation to assets and funds, as follows:

"The attention of providers that are exempt charities is drawn in particular to the legal obligation to apply their assets and funds only in the furtherance of their charitable purposes. This means that a charity must not use its assets (including land and buildings) and funds to give someone or a group of people a personal or private benefit, unless this is incidental. It must consider carefully how it spends its money so that it can explain how its decisions are, for example, advancing education. These responsibilities apply to all the funds and assets of providers that are exempt charities, and not just to the public funding or grant that a provider may receive."

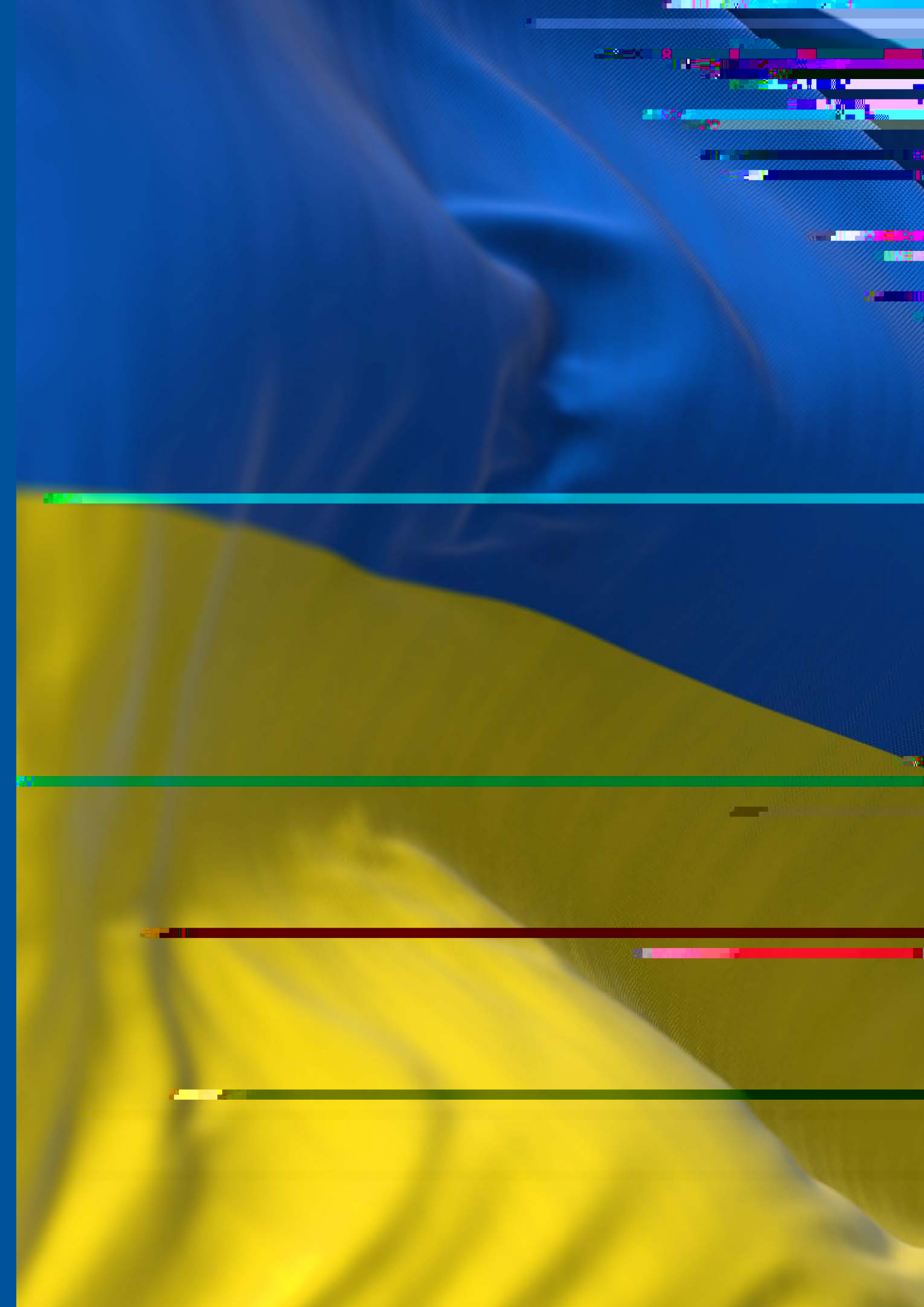
The Scottish Funding Council conditions of grant can be viewed at Annex D of the [SFC University Final Funding Allocations for Academic Year 2023/24](#). The [Scottish Code of Good HE Governance](#) also refers to the responsibilities of Court or equivalents to observe Scottish Charity Laws. Universities in Wales are also registered charities subject to Charity Commission laws.

39. Longer term, the need to move from funding to financing becomes more critical. Partnering effectively with those specialising in

43. Online models of learning may also be vital to education continuity during crisis. The Open University, a sector leader in the remote HE offering, delivered a [webinar](#) on online learning to over 800 participants from Ukrainian HEIs, demonstrating great interest in the online approach. At a basic level, a similar model may also be adapted as a future crisis-based learning model.
44. However, there may be lost opportunities within digital responses, with the lack of virtual mobility grants, that would have allowed greater flexibility in supporting displaced academics, being noted as a limitation. Some, including those in a third country such as Poland, have been unable to benefit from digital interventions.
45. Digital infrastructure has been the catalyst for many institutional responses to date. At its most basic, facilitating the communication between UK and Ukrainian HEIs to assess real needs, again emphasises the bottom-up approach to partnerships. At its most complex, it may even underpin the sharing of UK learning models internationally to support the continuation of learning during conflict. Where universities have been most facilitative, digital capacity has been central.
46. In the coordination of any response, the local context of the impacted country and its associated education structures must be considered. This may take place through thorough environmental analysis.
47. A key request of the Ukrainian HE sector was that any UK responses should aim to prevent brain drain. Instead, intellectual potential should be developed within the citizens engaging with the UK sector to become capacity builders upon their return to Ukraine. The role of universities in producing graduates who will in the future contribute to Ukraine's economy is strongly recognised, and UK influences may even accelerate the move to reconstruction. The UK's own ambition to transition into a research and innovation-led knowledge economy may well indicate its partnership potential in meeting Ukraine's ambition to develop 'science and technologies in synergy with economy'. This may be channelled via bilateral university relationships. The UK's blueprint for regional development, which focuses on local economies, heritage, and capacities, may also be transferrable.
48. The perceived attractiveness of the UK's HE sector, as praised by those connected most closely to UK institutions, does pose risks. Academics and researchers currently hosted by UK institutions may be recognised for their talent and recruited or decide to remain in the UK to take advantage of its research landscape and funding offering. Organisations like [Ukrainian Research Centre](#) and [Cara](#) have taken measures to mitigate this, including the turning down of scholarships or job offers to remain in the UK and the shortening of fellowship contracts to encourage the return to Ukraine when safe to do so.
49. Instead, the role of UK universities can be facilitative. In line with its levelling up agenda for example, the UK has strong capabilities and unwavering ambition for regional development – much of which relies on universities as the vehicle. The UK is therefore in a strong policy position to support the redevelopment of communities and local economies post-war. In skills planning, UK influences may also be valuable. Ukraine recognises a current disparity between the competencies of its graduates and those demanded by its economy. In reconstruction, the country will require more specialist skills in the areas of health, wellbeing, and psychological trauma. This demonstrates the potential of UK universities to transition their existing partnerships across a longer timeframe, where resources allow. This may also apply to the development of university leadership skills via capacity-building education.



Over the course of the research, we have observed the incredible power of the sector in uniting, collaborating, and generously sharing





Partnership Cycle



Higher Education Humanitarian Framework

Comprehensive environment analysis	Preparedness and capacity building	Initial and ongoing capability and needs assessment	Resource assessment, allocation, and mobilisation	Ongoing monitoring and evaluation
What is the political environment in which we are delivering, the constraints and enablers of all countries involved in the response?	What is the purpose of our intervention? What are our collective objectives and how will we measure the impact or success of delivery?	What expertise and knowledge are required to deliver?	What are the physical resources that will enable us to effectively deliver?	What is the ongoing purpose of our intervention? Is it still valid?
What are the economic resources and constraints?	What response are we intending to deliver and for how long?	What partnerships and networks would strengthen our response?	What partnerships and networks would strengthen our response?	What are our ongoing collective objectives and how will we measure the impact or success of delivery?
What are the social and cultural environments in which we are delivering? Do these present any values based or other conflicts?	How does the response differ from the ongoing research, education, and policy work through which we already deliver?	Are we adapting our people resources (knowledge, expertise, and experience) to reflect the changing nature of disaster, conflict, and other humanitarian need over time?	Are we adapting our physical resources and infrastructure to reflect the changing nature of disaster, conflict, and other humanitarian need over time?	What critical friends and/or evaluation partners could support impact evaluation?
What technological enablers or challenges are there to delivery, including infrastructure, connectivity, cyber and other challenge?	What type of response are we best placed to deliver?	How do we optimise our collective capabilities through effective partnerships both in and out of country?	How do we optimise the efficiency and effectiveness of physical resources and infrastructure through effective partnerships both in and out of country?	Are we deploying the correct evaluation frameworks at differing stages of intervention?
What is the legal and regulatory environment in which we are delivering, the constraints and enablers of all countries involved in the response?	What is our capacity and what expertise do we bring?			Are we ensuring that our response remains accountable to impacted communities?
What are the environmental considerations of engagement?	What existing partnerships and networks will we engage in our response to ensure we have the skills, knowledge, and experience to deliver?			
What is the education system/s with which we will be interacting? How do these support or limit our response?	What is our ongoing commitment to developing the skills, knowledge, experience, policies, and process to effectively deploy during times of crisis or ongoing humanitarian need?			

The framework poses a series of questions which are intended to guide the user in five distinct phases of a cyclical response.

Whilst much of the tool is analytical, delivering on the need for a reflective, considered, and meaningful response, the framework is also designed to answer the 'so what?', or perhaps the 'should we?' by posing questions regarding when, if and how individual universities, the sector and its partners should respond, and what capacity and capability can support at various stages of the delivery. In doing this it points directly to the findings of the report:

- The need to understand humanitarian response through those who are impacted.
- The need to work in partnership to deliver greater effectiveness and efficiency.
- The need for any response to be within the legal and regulatory capacities of the institution and geography.

The framework intentionally poses a significant number of questions which are intended to be answered at the institutional and then sector level. It is a self-reflective, self-analysis tool where responses in relation to capability and capacity can be consolidated to give a comprehensive understanding of the aggregate resources and skills available to be deployed in any given situation.



The framework advocates for considerable time and resource being engaged in preparedness and capacity building.

It is an area in which the sector already delivers through teaching, research, and knowledge exchange. Research groups play a particularly critical role in preparedness, and a recommendation of the main body of the report is to develop a comprehensive map of research expertise that could be reviewed and engaged dependent upon the particular humanitarian situation and local needs assessment.

It is at an institutional level that universities should

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Phase 4:

Resource assessment, allocation, and mobilisation*

To support various aspects of humanitarian response, including emergency aid, medical supplies, food and water, shelter, and long-term recovery efforts in the short, medium and longer term should be assessed and planned.

Including transportation, storage and distribution networks, procurement and supply chain management.

Access to infrastructure and resources including availability for deployment in a range of humanitarian situations.

These are increasingly key, ensuring accurate and timely information in relation to needs, resources, ongoing activities, and any gaps in response. They include digital capabilities and infrastructure to support and enhance data sharing and improved coordination.

Phase 5:

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation

Recognising that resource requirements and capabilities needs are likely to evolve through the phases of humanitarian response, the framework advocates for ongoing review of the mechanisms and interventions being deployed. Flexibility, adaptability, and coordination being essential to meet the changing needs of humanitarian crisis.

It is in this phase of the framework that there is also the potential, over time, to introduce performance indicators that are appropriate to the stage of humanitarian response.

* The creation and periodic refresh of shared capability and capacity assessments through effective and coordinated partnerships are a key recommendation of the report which advocates for the creation of a sector-wide competencies,

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