

Uzbekistan-UK Education Forum 2024

Summaries and Key Messages from Sessions

Day 1

Session 1. Meeting the needs of global and local contexts and making positive change: the role of universities and university partnerships

Presentation 1

Komiljon Karimov, Higher Education in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan's higher education system currently comprises 211 institutions of higher learning according to the latest system-wide data. The capital city of Tashkent is home to the plurality of institutions at 88, with the remaining 123 distributed among other regions of the country. Of the national total, 63 institutions fall under direct ministerial authority along with an additional 8 regional satellite campuses.

There are 114 public universities alongside 67 private not-for-profit universities and 30 foreign-operated higher education institutions admitted within Uzbekistan's borders. Within this network of diverse providers, approximately 41,300 academics currently deliver instruction. Total enrolled students surpass 1.35 million, with 632,443 pursuing full-time on-campus programmes and 586,066 enrolled in part-time studies. An additional 23,524 master's and doctoral candidates comprise the system's postgraduate contingent.

Academic staffing levels have grown remarkably in recent years, rising from 24,368 in 2016 to a projected 46,300 by 2024 according to national development targets. Enrollment aims to reach 308,628 undergraduate students and 30,800 postgraduates by 2026 to continue expanding access.

Priority strategic objectives for higher education reform through 2030 include bolstering inclusion, raising overall participation from 42% to 50%, designing university-led quality assurance mechanisms, safeguarding scholarly autonomy, developing research intensity with knowledge transfer emphasis, establishing Uzbekistan as a regional education hub through internationalization, providing institutional financial independence, and implementing digital transformation initiatives across campus operations and learning environments.

Presentation 2

Saurav Dev Bhatta, Towards Higher Education Excellence in Central Asia: A Roadmap for Improving the Quality of Education and Research through Regional Integration

- Central Asia has seen significant economic growth over the past 20 years but still faces challenges like low diversification, skills gaps, and infrastructure gaps. Higher education can play a key role in accelerating development.
- Central Asian countries have undergone higher education reforms and expanded access but still face common challenges around quality, relevance, research capacity, and regional integration.

- The roadmap proposes improving financing/governance, quality/relevance/access, research/innovation, and regional integration through national and regional interventions.
- Potential interventions include establishing centers of excellence, competitive research funds, technology transfer, mobility programmes, joint degrees, and quality assurance systems.
- Countries demonstrate strengths like Kazakhstan's internationalization model, Kyrgyz Republic's private sector role, Tajikistan's staff capacity reforms, and Uzbekistan's innovation ecosystem.
- Regional collaboration offers benefits like stronger quality standards, research opportunities, cost efficiency, and global engagement.
- Greater investment and cooperation in higher education can help address priorities, improve employability, and develop human resources for innovation across Central Asia.

Presentation 3

Maddeline Ansell, International education partnerships: addressing global challenges and national priorities

- Partnerships should address global challenges like health, climate change, skills gaps, but also support national priorities around access to higher education, capacity development, building trust and addressing skills gaps.
- Funding initiatives like Going Global Partnerships can support the development of education partnerships by providing resources to universities, colleges and other stakeholders.
- Partnerships should aim to broaden access to underrepresented groups by considering factors like socio-economic status, gender, age and disability.
- Successful partnerships result in outcomes like curricular development, new courses, teaching methods and infrastructure development in partner institutions.
- A clear policy and vision from governments provides guidance and confidence for institutions to invest in partnerships over the long term.
- Establishing a robust regulatory framework with mutually agreed standards helps enable confidence and consistency across partnerships.
- Partnerships built on trust, with realistic expectations and equal power dynamics between all partners are most likely to achieve sustainable success.

The key recommendation therefore is for partnerships to be strategically aligned with national development priorities, involve underrepresented groups, develop institutional capacity, and be founded on clear policies, trust and equitable relationships between partners.

Presentation 4

Viren Lall, The challenge of AI and how UK HEIs are responding

Here are the key points highlighting recommendations from the presentation:

- When discussing AI challenges, the presentation recommends focusing on constructive solutions rather than just banning technology, as AI is here to stay.
- Using plagiarism detection tools like Turnitin can help detect instances of improper AI and human use but must be combined with other measures.

- Training and awareness programmes for both students and educators are important to educate on ethical AI use and the importance of academic integrity.
- Ensuring appropriate referencing, paraphrasing and avoiding direct text copying are important to prevent malpractice.
- UK universities provide examples of positively harnessing AI opportunities through tailoring individual learning experiences, providing automated feedback, expediting grading processes, aiding research tasks and predicting student performance.
- The overall recommendation is for higher education institutions to take advantage of AI's opportunities while mitigating risks through a balanced approach of technical detection tools, educational programmes and policies focusing on proper and ethical AI utilization, rather than outright bans. This balanced approach can help meet global and local needs through responsible technology application.

Presentation 5

Gerald Lidstone

Key message

Aim for live MoUs, not for inactive ones.

Session 2. Ensuring excellence in university governance and quality assurance: case studies in good practice

Presentation 1

Inatullo Nematov, Quality Assurance in Higher Education Sector and Enhancing University Governance

The presentation focused on priority areas for strengthening quality assurance mechanisms in Uzbekistan's higher education sector. The speaker elaborated on several challenges impeding quality under existing frameworks as well as a new initiative aimed at enhancing university governance.

A fundamental issue is insufficient public funding allocated to higher education institutions. Adequately resourcing quality instruction demands the latest educational technologies and tools, yet underfunding constrain's institutions' ability to modernize pedagogical approaches and learning environments.

Additionally, decoupling curriculum and programme outcomes from labor market needs undermines relevance and utility of graduates' skillsets, exerting downward pressure on academic quality over time. Quality delivery also relies upon professionally competent and adequately trained faculty, an area still requiring improvement.

Related shortcomings include suboptimal teaching methodologies that do not engage students as active participants in the learning process. Poor development of independent and lifelong learning capacities likewise hampers universities' ability to cultivate knowledgeable, self-directed graduates equipped to thrive in the modern labour market.

High rates of plagiarism in HEIs further erode academic integrity and the credibility of research outputs due to insufficient institutional anti-plagiarism policies and lack of emphasis on scholarly values.

To address such challenges, the government and Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation recently initiated reforms augmenting university autonomy and self-governance. Institutions now independently determine strategic plans, budgets, enrollment figures, and oversee rectors' performance through strengthened governing boards, aiming to foster greater institutional accountability, capacity for change, and quality management systems. These initiatives are ongoing. The ministry is actively collaborating with world renowned organizations such as Advance HE and QAA to implement government initiatives to address the challenges pointed out above.

Presentation 2

Alison Johns, Effective Governance which Delivers Autonomy and Accountability

The presentation discussed effective governance in Uzbek higher education, focusing on autonomy, governance, regulation and next steps.

- It highlighted the current governance ecosystem including the Ministry, autonomous and non-autonomous universities, and transnational universities.
- Uzbekistan is on a governance journey, with good practice like supervisory boards and industry/student engagement, but mixed understanding of governance roles.
- Institutional autonomy means freedom within the law to manage operations, finances, academics and staffing. Governing bodies are responsible for reputation, risks, compliance and strategy/monitoring.
- "Smart regulation" balances compliance and partnership with regulatees using least intervention. Autonomy requires effective governance, leadership skills and quality frameworks.
- Key recommendations include developing a governance code, independent governor recruitment/development, embedding student/staff voice, and strategic oversight of long-term sustainability.
- Next steps are to develop the governance ecosystem, adapt codes and frameworks from other countries, and build capacity/confidence through professional governance support.

Presentation 3

Vicki Stott, Quality Standards Project

- A proposed definition of quality in higher education in Uzbekistan is presented, focusing on supporting student outcomes, meeting expectations, and achieving international recognition.
- Questions are raised about what students will need from higher education in 2030.
- An interconnected system is proposed including a quality code, higher education management information system, internal and external quality assurance, and standards.

- Work that has been done so far includes establishing a national QA working group, conducting a gap analysis against international standards, and developing a framework for a national Quality Code.
- A proposed structure for the Quality Code is outlined, covering topics like qualification attainment, programme design and approval, teaching and learning, and student involvement.
- Sample findings from the gap analysis recommend developing internal quality assurance policies and procedures and programme design and review processes.
- Next steps discussed include developing the Quality Code further, a system to support internal reviews, common standards for institutional evaluation, and trialling proposals with universities.

Session 3. Developing inclusive higher education in Uzbekistan: a presentation of the Inclusive HE stakeholder mapping exercise and the Good Practice Guide

Presentation 1

Dildora Salihodjaeva, Opportunities Created for Females and People with Disabilities in HE Sector in Uzbekistan

Currently, Uzbekistan's higher education institutions enroll approximately 598 thousand female students, representing a 12% increase since 2017. At the postgraduate level, 13,995 female students comprise 59.5% of the total postgraduate population.

The government of Uzbekistan actively promotes women's participation in higher education through financial assistance programmes. Namely, tuition fees are waived for eligible female students.

Analysis of enrollment data in STEM-related fields for 2023/2024 indicates that 64% of physics students identify as female. Each year, approximately 2,000 financially disadvantaged female students gain admission and receive government support, totaling over 7,000 beneficiaries to date through direct public funding of female enrollment.

In 2022, Uzbekistan allotted 1.25 trillion soums to support female students, projected to reach 1.296 trillion soums this September. Additionally, 6,217 female doctoral candidates are currently pursuing PhD and DSc degrees. Professional development opportunities abroad for female students and faculty are also government-sponsored.

Relevant ministries also work to ensure inclusive, quality higher education for individuals with physical impairments like visual or auditory disabilities through expanded access, tailored learning materials, and online resources like www.ishplus.uz to facilitate graduate employment.

Student recommendations to promote educational inclusion encompass online transfer options for epilepsy patients, flexible scheduling for impaired full-time students retaining public subsidies, establishing an international sign language programme, and university-led social enterprises promoting impaired student career readiness. Ongoing reforms systematically address participation barriers through multi-faceted policy interventions.

Presentation 2

Alex Hughes and Jamilya Gulyamova, Inclusive University Initiative, Uzbekistan

- The Inclusive University Initiative (IUI) was launched in Uzbekistan in 2022 by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovations in collaboration with the UK.
- An Inclusive University Working Group plays a key role by focusing on embedding inclusion in university strategies, shaping an inclusive curriculum, and providing inclusive student support.
- The initiative aims to enhance inclusive education in higher education and support Uzbekistan's commitments to UN Sustainable Development Goals related to empowering women/girls, people with disabilities, and those from low-income families.
- A Good Practice Guide was developed to provide guidance and share national and international examples of inclusive education.
- The Guide covers key sections on strategy/policy, inclusive curriculum, student support, partnerships, international positioning, and implementation process.
- Next steps include ongoing development of the Guide, inclusion of case studies, dissemination activities, development of pilot inclusion projects at Uzbekistani universities, and continued oversight by the Working Group.
- The overall goal is to champion and support the development and enhancement of inclusive education in higher education in Uzbekistan and beyond.

Presentation 3

Abdullo Abduhalilov

The presentation analyzed research on stakeholder perspectives of inclusion in universities in Uzbekistan. Survey findings showed 46% of visually impaired respondents said universities lacked elevators, while 26% cited barriers like stairs.

The presenter identified issues to address, including a lack of accessibility standards in universities built in the 1970-80s. Respondents also wanted a dedicated office/body for students with disabilities (70%) and an inclusiveness department. Academic staff need training on inclusiveness and special needs.

Stakeholders differed in some views - public universities said the government supports disabled students, while NGOs claimed more could be done. All agreed it is now harder for disabled people to attend university and more research is needed.

Recommendations were to establish accessibility standards, develop an inclusive education strategy, promote volunteer assistance, institute personal assistants, include inclusion metrics, and allocate inclusive budgets at universities. The presentation highlighted barriers faced and actions needed to create inclusive environments for impaired students.

Day 2

Session 4. Trends and developments in TNE and priorities for Uzbekistan – UK transnational education (TNE) collaboration: how Uzbekistan-UK TNE collaborations and international learning can support wider HE developments in Uzbekistan

Presentation 1

Nilgun Yalcin, Regional TNE Mapping: Interim Report

- British Council is a shaper of the future.
- The presentation provides insights from a project mapping UK Transnational Education (TNE) opportunities and challenges across seven countries in the Wider Europe region (Albania, Serbia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan).
- The project aims to map existing UK and non-UK TNE provision and provide recommendations to enhance UK TNE relations, using desk research, TNE mapping from various sources, and 35 interviews.
- Overviews of each country's higher education landscape and student mobility patterns are given.
- According to the data, Kazakhstan is the leading country of destination for Uzbek students.
- Data on UK TNE enrolments from 2017/18-2021/22 show most TNE is offered online or through partnerships, with popular subjects including business and management.
- Key UK providers offering TNE programmes identified, such as City College (University of York validated), Coventry University, University of London.
- Future recommendations focus on influencing policy to remove barriers and create an enabling environment for TNE, while also promoting quality and TNE's role in transforming education systems.
- Uzbekistan UK TNEs are leading the list in terms of student population.
- In conclusion, the mapping project provides valuable data and insights to strengthen UK-partner country relations and facilitate scalable, sustainable UK TNE globally, in line with the British Council's vision.

Presentation 2

Abdumalik Jumanov, HE and TNE Developments in Uzbekistan

- The presentation provides an overview of higher education and transnational education (TNE) developments in Uzbekistan.
- There are currently 65 non state higher education institutions (HEIs), 30 foreign HEIs and their branches, 24 HEI regional branches, 1 conservatory, 5 academies, 48 institutes in Uzbekistan. Most HEIs have rather narrow specializations.
- Organizational models of HEIs include validated programmes, franchised programmes, and branch campuses. Ownership form is public international, international joint, and private. Organization according to funding source: co-financed by founders – non-profit, self-funded: non-profit, profit oriented and joint venture.

- TNE programmes in Uzbekistan are mostly teaching-oriented in subject areas like IT, education, and business. Delivery models include franchised programmes, branch campuses, and locally accredited curricula.
- Trends in Uzbekistan's HEIs include more government support for STEM universities, standalone central universities, private HEIs growing rapidly but with quality/profit tensions, and some private HEIs losing their licenses.
- A strategic framework is recommended for developing TNE, with phases focused on setup, startup, growth, enhancement, and strengthening research capacities over 10-15 years.
- The presentation then focuses on plans for the Pharmaceutical Technical University, including its academic programmes, strategy for capacity building and campus development, and partnerships with international universities for programs and research.
- The university will be developed with \$83.7 million in funding from 2024-2026 to help advance the pharmaceutical industry in Uzbekistan.

Presentation 3

David Carter, The UK HE perspective

The presentation mapped the top transnational education partners of UK higher education institutions globally. Despite requiring additional staffing and resources to effectively manage transnational operations, internationalization provides strong incentives for UK universities given declining domestic enrollment and reliance on international student tuition fees. Based on a recent survey of 70 higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland, 40% currently report a deficit.

In response to stringent UK immigration policies that limit international student mobility, universities have increasingly internationalized their operations through transnational education partnerships to maximize overseas enrollments. From the student perspective, transnational arrangements enhance accessibility and affordability of UK higher education.

Uzbekistan notably hosts one of the top 20 transnational education populations engaging with UK institutions. This is attributable firstly to Uzbekistan's favorable demographic trends and growing demand for international education. Secondly, Uzbekistan cultivates a stable regulatory environment conducive to transnational programme development.

However, building local academic capacity remains imperative to safeguard student learning experiences abroad. The British Management University exemplifies a self-contained transnational initiative launched in 2020 to provide UK-caliber degrees and quality assurance standards offshore.

Effectively building capacity necessitates collaborative needs assessments rather than one-directional training alone. Partnerships must foster mutual understanding and jointly deliver high-quality instruction. Outstanding questions pertain to whether a solely British model optimally serves Uzbek interests, or if a hybrid approach blending domestic and international expertise could yield superior outcomes.

Presentation 4

Stephen Wallis, University of Westminster and Westminster International University in Tashkent

- The presentation provides a case study of the University of Westminster's Transnational Education partnership with Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT) in Uzbekistan.
- WIUT was founded in 2002 through a collaboration between the University of Westminster and the Foundation of the President of Uzbekistan, making it the first international university in Uzbekistan.
- It has grown from an initial 120 students to over 5,200 currently and offers programmes from foundation to postgraduate level in subjects like business, law, and public health.
- Quality assurance is overseen by the University of Westminster while the institution is staffed and facilities owned locally.
- Programmes are taught in English using locally employed staff with international experience.
- Factors in the successful 20-year partnership include commitment from both sides, a desire to learn from each other, and dedicated support staff.
- Additional areas of collaboration have included student and staff exchange, research projects, policy work, and initiatives on inclusion and governance.
- The case study highlights the long-term benefits and distinctive transnational education model established through this partnership.

Presentation 5

Hikmat Abdurahmanov, TEAM University – private entrepreneurship university in Uzbekistan

- The presentation provides information about TEAM University, a private entrepreneurship university founded in Uzbekistan.
- London South Bank University (LSBU) is named as TEAM's academic partner. LSBU is accredited and has received awards for graduate employability and entrepreneurship.
- TEAM University aims to develop strong industrial ties with companies in Uzbekistan in sectors like banking, retail, healthcare, and more.
- Proposed degree programmes for the 2024/2025 academic year include International Business and Entrepreneurship, Marketing and Entrepreneurship, Digital Innovations and Entrepreneurship, and Tourism and Hotel Management.
- The presentation emphasizes LSBU's strong reputation and experience in providing professional and accredited education since 1892.
- Partnerships with leading companies in Uzbekistan are highlighted to demonstrate TEAM's focus on developing entrepreneurial skills applicable to industry.
- In summary, it introduces TEAM University as a new private university being established in Uzbekistan with the goal of combining entrepreneurship education and strong industry ties, supported by its academic partnership with LSBU.

Session 5. Enabling innovation and impact in research, knowledge exchange and technology transfer: case studies in good practice

Presentation 1

Dibyesh Anand, Sustainable Development Goals and its National, Regional and Global Impact: Research and Knowledge Exchange

- The presentation focuses on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their national, regional and global impact through research and knowledge exchange.
- The SDGs comprise 17 goals and 169 targets to address urgent social, economic and environmental challenges facing the world by 2030, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate change and more.
- Progress on the SDGs requires multi-stakeholder partnerships between governments, civil society, academia and the private sector to generate and share knowledge that can inform policy and decision-making.
- Universities have an important role to play through research, teaching, collaboration and acting as hubs that convene experts across disciplinary divides to solve complex sustainable development challenges.
- The University of Westminster is highlighted as an example of an institution undertaking research and knowledge exchange activities to support the realisation of the SDGs both locally and globally.
- While achieving the SDGs faces numerous challenges, Prof Anand emphasizes their potential to drive positive change and create a more inclusive and sustainable society and world if pursued with commitment and partnership.
- In conclusion, the presentation outlines how research and collaboration between different actors can help assess and accelerate progress on the SDGs globally and their importance as a framework for development.

Presentation 2

Lachyn Italmazova, Sustainability at the Core: Examining THE Impact Rankings

- THE Impact Rankings evaluate universities' performance across the three dimensions of teaching, research, and impact & sustainability against the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
- Participation has grown significantly over the years, with over 1,700 universities from 115 countries submitting data in 2023. Uzbekistan increased its representation from 30 to 53 institutions between 2022-2023.
- Central Asia contributes less on average to the SDGs compared to global metrics, with some SDGs like quality education and climate action showing comparatively higher median outputs.
- Uzbekistani institutions performed highest on average for SDGs related to quality education, gender equality and clean water/sanitation. Research scores were also strongest for these goals.
- Universities support the SDGs through research, stewardship practices, teaching programmes, and community outreach. This aligns with their societal role of making a positive real-world impact.
- Success stories from participating universities are highlighted, with a focus on celebrations and knowledge exchange at the upcoming Global Sustainable Development Congress in Bangkok in 2024.
- In conclusion, the presentation outlined THE Impact Rankings methodology and trends in Central Asian and Uzbekistani participation, with a focus on harnessing the rankings to facilitate sustainable development.

Adkham Khudoykulov, Research and Innovation Conditions in Uzbekistan: The Role of Educators and University Leaders

The presentation identified several issues pertaining to knowledge and innovation transfer between academia and industry in the country. The speaker noted a lack of close collaboration between university research and the commercial sector, resulting in academic outputs not adequately reaching potential users to realize practical benefits. This has engendered some skepticism towards fundamental research.

To address such challenges, several mechanisms were proposed to strengthen partnerships between these domains. Formalizing communications through forums could facilitate sharing research findings with industry stakeholders to foster engagement. Involving industry perspectives in university research planning was advocated to enhance relevance. Additionally, establishing knowledge transfer metrics was recommended to evaluate the societal impacts of academic work and ensure public funding for the sector effectively catalyzes innovation that addresses national priorities. Overall, the presentation underscored the need for targeted initiatives to shorten the separation between these spheres and optimize the application of academic discoveries for economic and social progress.

Ayhan Akanay, Bibliometric Perspectives on Critical Impact of Global Research

- The presentation provides a global overview of trends in publication metrics, scholarly output, research funding, and the impact of research on policymaking and the UN Sustainable Development Goals from 2013-2022.
- The global scholarly output has significantly increased over the past decade, with an average annual growth rate of around 3%.
- A benchmark comparison of selected country groups shows emerging economies in Asia experiencing the fastest growth in number of publications in recent years.
- Total global spending on research and development has steadily increased in recent years, reaching over \$2 trillion in 2022 according to estimates.
- Major public and private sector bodies like the EU, China, and industry players like Samsung are among the top global research funders.
- There is a positive correlation between scholarly output growth and increased patent filings and innovation impact over time.
- Analysis of citations shows the increasing influence of research on policy documents from international organizations.
- Data on Uzbekistan specifically shows its growing contribution to several UN Sustainable Development Goals through increased research and knowledge generation.
- In conclusion, the presentation outlines global trends highlighting the rising impact of scholarship globally and Uzbekistan's growing role in supporting sustainable development goals.

Key takeaways

- Uzbekistan and the UK have an established history of successful transnational education partnerships through initiatives like Westminster International University in Tashkent. However, there is potential to strengthen these partnerships further.
- Building local academic capacity in Uzbekistan is important to ensure high-quality learning experiences for students studying abroad or through transnational programmes. Partnerships should involve needs assessments and expertise from both sides.

- Uzbekistan shows growing demand for international education and maintains a stable regulatory environment conducive to transnational programme development. However, questions remain on ensuring transnational models optimally serve the interests of Uzbekistan and wider global community.
- Inclusive education, research collaboration, and alignment with priorities like the Sustainable Development Goals present opportunities to enhance the impact and relevance of Uzbekistan-UK cooperation and collaboration.
- Private universities in Uzbekistan partnering with UK institutions, like TEAM University, could help combine entrepreneurship education with strong industry links.
- Mechanisms like mapping projects and conferences help share insights on existing cooperation and identify ways to strengthen, scale and diversify Uzbekistan-UK higher education relationships going forward.