



Uzbekistan – United Kingdom Education Forum 2024

4-5 March 2024

Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT)
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

The second Uzbek-UK Education Forum was held on 4-5 March 2024. The Forum is a joint initiative between the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovations of the Republic of Uzbekistan (MHESI), the British Council in Uzbekistan, the University of Westminster, and Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT). The Forum was held at Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT), Uzbekistan.

The Forum addressed core priorities for Higher Education in Uzbekistan, the UK and globally and highlighted key ways in which these priorities are delivered, including through transnational educational (TNE) collaborations. The impact of Higher Education policy, practice, and partnerships was a focus throughout.

The objectives of the Forum included:

- To address how universities can and do respond to the requirements of global and local contexts and markets and effect positive change
- To respond to national higher education reform and internationalisation agendas by addressing how universities ensure excellence in governance and quality assurance
- To attend to the further development of inclusive higher education in Uzbekistan, through a presentation of the Inclusive University stakeholder mapping exercise and the new Good Practice Guide
- To share good practice in development and innovation in the areas of research, knowledge exchange, and technology transfer, with a focus on impact and how impact is evaluated
- To discuss key trends in TNE, launch the British Council TNE strategy, and explore how Uzbekistan-UK TNE collaborations and international learning can impact positively upon wider higher education developments in Uzbekistan
- To provide a platform for partnership development discussions to be taken forward.

The event brought together 30 delegates from the UK and 107 delegates from Uzbekistan to share ideas, thinking, and expertise. The delegations included Uzbek Government officials, invited VCs, DVCs and PVCs from universities in the UK and Uzbekistan, and representatives from the private sector, international agencies, and think tanks.. The UK HE sector was represented by QAA CEO Vicki Stott; Advance HE CEO Alison Johns; the Deputy Director Quality of the Office for Students, Jean Arnold; the President and VC of the University of Westminster, Peter Bonfield; the Commercial Director for UK-Europe, Times Higher Education, Lachyn Italmazova; and DVCs and PVCs of UK TNE partners working in Uzbekistan. The Forum was attended by the British Council Director Education, Maddalaine Ansell, and the British Council Regional Director Wider Europe, Adrian Chadwick.

Future collaborative opportunities between Uzbekistan and the UK and developments in higher education policy were areas of attention throughout the Forum. As part of the Forum, MoUs around strategic collaboration between the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovations, the QAA, and Advance HE were signed by the First Deputy Minister and CEOs of the QAA and Advance HE. 16 MoUs between individual universities in Uzbekistan and UK organisations such as Norwich Institute for Language Education and Times Higher Education were also signed.

The first day included a presentation by the First Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovations, Dr Komiljon Karimov, on key priorities and educational developments in Uzbekistan and a presentation by Maddalaine Ansell on global trends in HE development and how international education partnerships address global challenges and national priorities. A senior World Bank representative from Washington DC, Saurav Dev Bhatta, presented the outcomes of the World Bank's recent report on HE in Central Asia. Forum sessions addressed how universities respond to the requirements of and challenges from global and local environments and markets, shared case studies from large scale projects in Uzbekistan and the UK, explored what effective university governance and quality assurance look like, and discussed the roadmaps for University Governance and Quality Codes development. The national inclusive university working group under the MHESI presented the findings of the Inclusive University stakeholder mapping, launched the new Inclusive University Good Practice Guide, and outlined concrete processes for developing inclusive higher education in Uzbekistan.

The second day explored trends and developments in TNE, presented the new British Council TNE strategy, discussed the findings of the British Council TNE mapping project, and shared Uzbekistan-UK partnership case studies. A key focus was on how Uzbekistan-UK TNE collaboration can support wider higher education developments in Uzbekistan. The final session addressed innovation and impact in research and knowledge exchange, explored linkages with the SDGs, and shared impact data on Central Asia by Times Higher Education and Elsevier.

The Forum had a strong EDI focus, engaged academics and students with disabilities, and provided simultaneous and sign language interpreting. Programme materials were available in braille. A team of volunteers was trained to offer support to delegates with disabilities.

All Forum suggestions and recommendations are reviewed by dedicated working groups and will be summarized in the Forum report. All Forum programme and reference materials as well as speakers' presentations are on the website: <https://conference.wiut.uz/uzukedu2024>.

Some observations and views from major UK and Uzbekistan stakeholders and delegates:

- *'Higher education in Uzbekistan expanded massively in a very short time. The proportion of school leavers joining university has increased from 9% in 2017 to 42% last year. Over half of undergraduates, are women.'*
- *'The expansion raises issues both of quality and capacity. The Government recognises the challenges and wants to work with the UK. Universities are encouraged to work with the UK. TNE is seen as a way to build capacity' for change.*
- *'Uzbekistan is one of the most exciting countries in the world for international HE. On 2021-22 HESA data, it has the 17th highest number of UK TNE enrolments'.*
- *'Hard work goes into making a success of a TNE partnership. Good examples of UK TNEs in Uzbekistan'*
- *'Full alignment of UK/British Council contribution with national HE reform and systemic change' agendas; 'excellent stakeholder engagement and co-creation'*
- *'New models co-created for University Governance and QA during a period of rapid growth and expansion of access to HE'*
- *UK/British Council well positioned for donor funded projects eg the World Bank forthcoming HE project*
- *'The theme of inclusivity running throughout excellent contributions from panel members and the audience'.*
'There is a firm commitment to EDI; 'although the legal context is very different from the UK, same principles apply'
Clear need 'for policy change to support inclusion in HE through the Inclusive University Working Group run together with WIUT, University of Westminster and the Ministry; staff and students with disabilities were invited to the Forum ... and given opportunities to raise barriers preventing them from getting the full benefit from their studies in front of ministry representatives. The visibility of these staff and students was very powerful for reinforcing the message'
- *One of the best HE conferences in terms of the range and quality of speakers and the issues raised*
- *'I have been at very few conferences where inclusion has been so fully integrated into the conversation'.*

Quotes:

Komiljon Karimov, First deputy minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovations of the Republic of Uzbekistan:

"Education is an integral part of the bilateral partnership agenda between Uzbekistan and the UK. We are working together to implement in Uzbekistan a cutting-edge experience in modern higher education. Our joint efforts focus on quality assurance, university governance, the teaching of English, and other areas.

It is great to see that the Forum is gradually becoming a tradition in Uzbek-UK relations. This is an important platform where both sides identify and deepen promising areas of collaboration in the education sphere."

Denise Waddingham, Director, British Council Uzbekistan: *"The Forum represents an exciting opportunity for stakeholders from both countries to come together face to face to discuss the issues facing the HE sector today. We're delighted to be welcoming the British Council's global Director Education, Maddalaine Ansell and Regional Director, Adrian Chadwick to Tashkent to see first-hand the strength of Uzbekistan-UK collaboration".*

Bakhrom Mirkasimov, Rector, WIUT:

"We are excited to continue this initiative and to host the second Uzbekistan – United Kingdom Education Forum with our partners. Our TNE partnership with the University of Westminster is unique within the UK and internationally. Through this Forum, we look forward to strengthening international collaboration and higher education policy and practice impact in Uzbekistan."

Peter Bonfield, Vice Chancellor and President, University of Westminster: *"The Forum brings together stakeholders from Uzbekistan and the UK for two days of dynamic discussion, addressing opportunities and challenges facing Higher Education in both nations. I'm delighted to be able to share perspectives drawn from our longstanding and unique TNE partnership with Westminster International University in Tashkent (WIUT). And I'm excited to be part of the Forum's energetic exploration of how transnational educational connections can support the further growth of capacity building work and excellence in Higher Education in Uzbekistan and the UK."*

Alison Johns, CEO Advance HE:

"Having worked with the British Council colleagues, the Ministry and universities in Uzbekistan for over five years now this forum exemplified the excellent progress made through solid partnerships and committed colleagues working together. The quality of the sessions was particularly notable and the broad engagement at senior level and the inclusivity of the audience was another standout feature. Congratulations to the team and various people who conceived and contributed to this event. A real credit and highly productive."