The UK-Ukraine ResearchBridge:

Accelerating reconstruction through science and innovation

Held on 26 March 2026

Conference report

THE ROYAL SOCIETY

Fund of the President of Ukraine

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

UK Science & Technology Network

UCL

UK-UKRAINE ResearchBridge

The UK-Ukraine ResearchBridge: Accelerating reconstruction through science and innovation
Issued July 2026 DES9536
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Introduction

On 26 March 2026, the Royal Society, University College London, and the UK Government's Science and Technology Network convened the *UK-Ukraine ResearchBridge: Accelerating reconstruction through science and innovation* conference.

The event brought together participants from the UK and Ukraine, including ministers, scientific advisers, research leaders, representatives from twinned universities, senior researchers from UK and Ukrainian and Universities, and members of the Ukrainian research diaspora.

The UK-Ukraine ResearchBridge programme, delivered by University College London and supported by the UK Government's Science and Technology Network aims to catalyse and support sustainable partnerships between UK and Ukrainian research and innovation institutions, companies, NGOs, and governments, delivering under the UK-Ukraine 100 Year Partnership.

Participants showcased the impact of UK-Ukraine research and innovation partnerships and discussed how such collaborations can best support Ukraine's sustainable recovery while strengthening mutual capabilities.

The Conference also explored practical funding and policy pathways for advancing UK-Ukraine collaboration ideas, including Horizon Europe and other existing mechanisms capable of supporting scalable partnerships.

Participants emphasised that UK-Ukraine research collaboration is not only a response to crisis, but a strategic opportunity built on complementary strengths. Ukraine brings deep applied scientific and engineering capability, strong mathematical and technical expertise, and uniquely valuable real world testing environments across areas such as energy resilience, health systems, and defence innovation. These capabilities are being developed and stress tested under extreme conditions, generating insights with global relevance.

The UK brings internationally leading research infrastructure, funding systems, and pathways to scale innovation through industry, regulation, and global partnerships. Bringing these strengths together enables co development of solutions that are both immediately applicable in Ukraine's recovery and transferable to wider international challenges.

This report is not a verbatim record of the conference, but a summary of the discussions held, the key points raised, and the areas for future action identified to help shape the next stage of the ResearchBridge programme and strengthen partnerships and collaboration across the UK-Ukraine research and innovation system

The views and opinions expressed are those of the conference participants and do not necessarily represent those of the Royal Society, University College London, UK Government, the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine.

Image: Conference participants.

Foreword

The United Kingdom and Ukraine share an enduring and rapidly deepening partnership, one grounded in common values, a commitment to security and resilience, and a shared belief in the power of science and innovation to shape a better future.

The UK-Ukraine 100-Year Partnership, agreed in January 2025, set out an ambitious vision to strengthen cooperation across multiple domains, including science and technology. At a time when Ukraine continues to defend its sovereignty in the face of Russia's illegal invasion, the UK remains a steadfast supporter of Ukraine and its people. The courage and resilience demonstrated by Ukrainian institutions, researchers, and innovators throughout this period have been extraordinary. Science in Ukraine has not paused, it has adapted, evolved, and continued to deliver solutions under the most challenging conditions.

This context makes scientific collaboration not only desirable, but essential.

Research partnerships between the UK and Ukraine are already demonstrating how joint efforts can address urgent needs, from strengthening energy resilience and healthcare systems, to advancing digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and defence-related innovation.

These collaborations draw on complementary strengths: the UK's world-leading research base and pathways to scale innovation, alongside Ukraine's deep technical expertise and experience of operating and innovating in highly complex, real-world environments.

At the same time, science and technology will play a central role in Ukraine's societal and economic recovery.

The 100-Year Partnership makes clear that Ukraine's reconstruction is not only a national priority, but one in which both countries can lead together across key sectors, supporting reform, renewal, and long-term development. Research, evidence, and innovation will be fundamental to rebuilding infrastructure, strengthening institutions, and ensuring that recovery efforts are sustainable, resilient, and aligned with European and global standards.

Importantly, this is not a one way relationship. Collaboration with Ukraine offers the UK access to unique insights, data, and testing environments that are directly relevant to our own priorities, from energy system resilience and health security to cybersecurity and the peaceful use and exploration of outer space. By working together, we can co-develop solutions that are applicable not only in Ukraine, but across the UK, Europe and internationally.

The UK-Ukraine ResearchBridge conference is an excellent example of how this partnership can be translated into practical collaboration. Sustained, structured engagement across both research ecosystems will be essential if we are to move from high-level ambition to tangible outcomes. Initiatives such as ResearchBridge play an important role in supporting this process, helping to connect researchers, align priorities, and reduce the practical barriers to collaboration.

As we look ahead, the task is clear: to build on the momentum of the 100-Year Partnership and ensure that our joint efforts support both Ukraine's modern and sustainable recovery and our shared long-term ambitions. Science and technology remain at the heart of this partnership, delivering impact where it is most needed, and shaping a more resilient future for both our countries.

Professor Chris Johnson
Chief Scientific Adviser, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

Why this matters now

Speakers highlighted that, since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the UK research community has provided support to colleagues in Ukraine in a number of ways. These have ranged from institutional links, such as the University Twinning Programme, to individual support for researchers who have had to leave Ukraine during the war.

Speakers also noted that science is rightly a core pillar of the UK-Ukraine 100-Year Partnership Agreement, signed in 2025. Scientific collaboration will be essential both in responding to immediate needs and in supporting Ukraine's renewal and long-term recovery.

"Throughout four years of full-scale invasion, Ukrainian science has demonstrated extraordinary resilience. Despite constant attacks and power outages, our scientists continue to work, conduct research, and share knowledge while we continue transforming the system."

Denys Kurbatov
Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine

"Our partnership with the UK brings practical results across multiple tracks with the Ministry's work. Together, we are merging British academic expertise with Ukrainian tech solutions to drive real innovation in digital governance, education, and R&D. Together, we are building the technological foundation for our shared future."

Oleksandr Bornyakov
Minister of Digital Transformation of Ukraine

Image: Denys Kurbatov, Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine, delivering a prerecorded video message to participants.

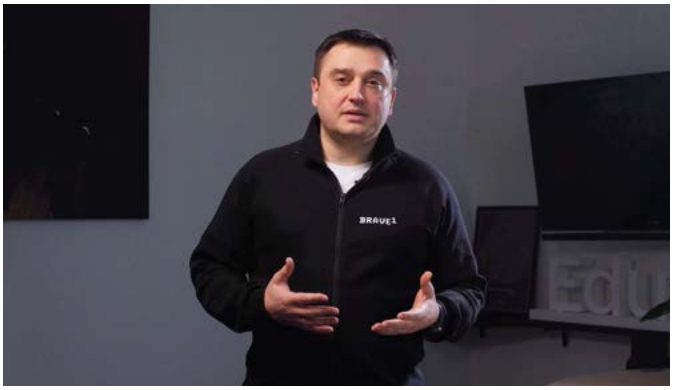


Image: Oleksandr Bronyakov, Minister of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, delivering a prerecorded video message to participants.

Participants emphasised the value of UK-Ukraine partnerships, noting their importance for mutual knowledge exchange, building on areas of strength in both countries and how research can support Ukraine's recovery while creating opportunities for the future.

They also highlighted the need for more active engagement across UK and Ukrainian research and innovation ecosystems to build connections and explore collaboration opportunities. In this context, research-performing institutions were encouraged to adapt existing programmes and pathways, such as funding schemes and mobility initiatives, to include Ukraine more systematically, thereby strengthening and sustaining these links.

Participants reflected that the ResearchBridge programme can play a vital role in furthering the connections between the UK and Ukraine by catalysing and supporting sustainable partnerships between research and innovation institutions, companies, NGOs, and governments in both countries.

"Science and engineering offer clear opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration, particularly in space, medical resilience, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and other advanced technologies. For example, the UK and Ukrainian space agencies have already launched a series of joint initiatives."

Professor Chris Johnson
Chief Scientific Adviser, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology

Image: Professor Chris Johnson, Chief Scientific Adviser, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

Image: Dr William Lovegrove, University College London.

Creating UK-Ukraine partnerships

Key conference messages

- Ukraine is undergoing a profound transformation shaped by war, recovery, and European integration. Russia's full-scale invasion has significantly increased the risks of talent loss, reinforcing the need for sustained international partnerships to support skills, research capacity, and institutional resilience.
- Post-war recovery will require a new generation of highly skilled professionals, alongside rapid modernisation of education and research systems, and stronger alignment between academia, industry with European and global standards.
- The WinWin strategy, championed by Ukraine's Ministry of Digital Transformation, has provided a clear focal point for UK engagement across government and the wider innovation ecosystem. The strategy brings together government, universities, priority sectors, business and start-ups, framing collaboration as a means to support Ukraine's success both during the war and in the peace that follows, while also delivering mutual economic and governance benefits for the UK.
- Win-Win has also catalysed engagement across the UK's research and innovation community. For example, University College London signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Digital Transformation at the first Win-Win Innovation Summit in November 2025, reflecting growing institutional commitment to long-term collaboration. Progress against the multi-stakeholder Research and Innovation Coalition signed by the UK Government and international partners at the Ukraine Recovery Conference 2025 in Rome will be reviewed at the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Gdańsk in June 2026
- Partnerships are also being embedded through structural and programme-level initiatives. The UK-Ukraine University Twinning Programme, delivered jointly by Universities UK and Cormack Consultancy Group, has now connected over 100 universities, supporting partnerships across education, research, and institutional development. The UK Embassy in Kyiv uses ODA-funded programming to support the Ministry of Digital Transformation and delivery of the Win-Win innovation strategy. From May 2026, the UK Government's Science and Technology Network will further strengthen this engagement through a dedicated science officer based at the British Embassy in Kyiv, enhancing connectivity between governments, institutions, and innovation ecosystems and supporting delivery on the ground.
- InnovateUkraine is a UK funded collaborative R&D programme enabling UK and Ukrainian organisations to jointly pilot energy innovations that address shared system challenges and support Ukraine's energy recovery. Recognised as a leading example of delivery under the UK-Ukraine 100-Year Partnership, the programme has already supported 26 innovation projects across heat, power, storage, circular construction and bioenergy. These projects demonstrate tangible impact, achieved despite operating in active conflict conditions.

Image: Conference participants.

Project showcases

During the conference, participants showcased six UK-Ukraine project-level collaborations in MedTech, clean energy and green recovery, highlighting successes and key lessons learned. The presenters have supplied abstracts for these projects, detailing their shared experiences and outcomes.

BridgeUkraine: accelerating reconstruction through science, skills and partnerships

Summary

BridgeUkraine was founded in response to the urgent need to reconstruct Ukraine's built environment in a sustainable, resilient, and equitable manner.

BridgeUkraine is an interdisciplinary, non-profit initiative that brings together over 70 academics, engineers, policymakers, and international partners to bridge the gap between research, policy, and practical implementation in post-conflict recovery.

The collaboration combines UK engineering and resilience expertise with Ukrainian on-the-ground data and technical knowledge. UK partners include University College London and Brunel University London, while Ukrainian collaborators include researchers and practitioners from institutions such as Lviv Polytechnic National University, Kharkiv National Automobile and Highway University, the State Enterprise "National Institute for Development Infrastructure", Vinnytsia National Technical University, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, the Institute of Telecommunications and Global Information Space, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, and the Ukrainian Hydrometeorological Institute, among others.

Image: Professor Stergios-Aristoteles Mitoulis, University College London.

At its core, BridgeUkraine advances a science-driven paradigm for reconstruction, moving beyond traditional, interest-driven approaches that often prioritise short-term economic or political gains.

Instead, it promotes evidence-based decision-making, leveraging AI, remote sensing, and open data to assess damage, prioritise investments, and optimise recovery strategies under uncertainty and resource constraints. A key innovation lies in shifting infrastructure design from component-level performance to system-level resilience, incorporating interdependencies, cascading risks, and long-term socio-economic impacts.

The initiative is structured around three interconnected pillars:

1. Research and innovation, developing advanced resilience frameworks and digital tools for infrastructure planning;
2. Capacity building, notably through the Empower Ukraine programme, which delivers Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), micro credentials, and professional training aligned with Eurocodes to thousands of Ukrainian engineers and students; and
3. Institutional partnerships, fostering collaboration with Ukrainian ministries, universities, and international organisations to ensure translation of research into policy and practice.

Since its inception, BridgeUkraine has secured over £4.5 million in funding, established strategic partnerships, and delivered large-scale educational and research outputs supporting Ukraine's recovery.

Ultimately, the initiative positions reconstruction not merely as rebuilding infrastructure, but as an opportunity to enable long-term resilience, sustainability, and inclusive development, ensuring that Ukraine's cities and systems can adapt, recover, and thrive in the face of future uncertainties.

Adap-t-socket: a new generation of adaptive prosthetic sockets

Summary

Kharkiv National Medical University, founded in 1804 and the oldest medical school in Ukraine, continues to operate under conditions of full-scale war, maintaining its educational, clinical, and research activities. In this context, Ukraine faces a rehabilitation challenge of unprecedented scale, with over 100,000 military personnel and civilians having undergone traumatic amputations. This represents the largest demand for complex rehabilitation in Europe since the Second World War, with implications extending across European healthcare systems.

The critical issue is not the availability of prostheses, but their long-term functionality, adaptability, and capacity to prevent complications. Conventional prosthetic sockets are static systems that fail to respond to physiological changes such as variations in stump volume, temperature, humidity, and physical activity. This often results in pain, reduced mobility, and repeated clinical interventions.

The Adap-t-socket project aims to develop a new generation of adaptive prosthetic sockets through a UK-Ukraine research consortium comprising Kharkiv National Medical University, Lancaster University, and Dnipro University of Technology.

The project integrates clinical medicine, engineering, and artificial intelligence into a unified workflow, including high-precision 3D stump mapping, AI-assisted load prediction and socket design, multi-material manufacturing, and biomechanical validation through motion capture-based gait analysis.

Beyond a single device, the project establishes a closed-loop rehabilitation ecosystem, linking digital patient data, algorithm-driven design, fabrication, and clinical validation, with continuous feedback into evidence-based protocols.

Designed for scalability, the initiative is preparing a Horizon Europe application to support broader implementation. The goal is to develop reproducible digital workflows and adaptable rehabilitation protocols applicable across diverse healthcare settings.

This collaboration represents an equal UK-Ukraine scientific partnership, combining real-world clinical demand with advanced research capacity to address a major European rehabilitation challenge with global relevance.

Image: Olena Semenenko, Kharkiv National Medical University.

Conflict, health security, and global resilience: an integrated research programme at King's College London

Summary

The Centre for Conflict and Health Security and the Department of War Studies at King's College London host multidisciplinary research programmes focused on the interrelated health and security consequences of the conflict in Ukraine, spanning four interconnected pillars: clinical medicine in conflict settings, health system strengthening, chemical and biological (CB) incident preparedness and response, and mis/disinformation. Led by Dr Gemma Bowsher, Dr Filippa Lentzos and Professor Richard Sullivan, the programmes address the acute and evolving threats to health security arising from Russia's full-scale invasion and the hybrid warfare environment in which it is embedded.

A defining feature of the programme are their commitment to grounded in-country research. The team has maintained a regular presence in Ukraine throughout the full-scale invasion, conducting research and institutional engagements in Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kyiv, and Odesa. The team actively translates this fieldwork into engagement at the UN and WHO, contributing to multilateral deliberations on health in conflict, CB threat governance, and the integrity of the global health information environment.

The clinical medicine and health system strengthening pillars have made substantial contributions to documenting cancer care collapse and civilian health infrastructure destruction in Ukraine, informing international policy on health system resilience, the protection of medical facilities under international humanitarian law, and oncology service reconstruction. The CB preparedness pillar addresses the heightened risk of chemical and biological incidents encompassing dual-use science, deliberate agent deployment, and outbreak attribution. This connects directly to the mis/disinformation pillar, which examines the systematic weaponisation of health and scientific narratives by state and non-state actors and operationalises evidence-informed counter-disinformation tools.

The programme is supported by international funding commitments exceeding £5 million, primarily from the Government of Canada and King's College London, reflecting sustained confidence in its policy relevance and global health security impact.

Image: Dr Gemma Bowsher, King's College London.

Collaborative research initiative between the University of Portsmouth and Odesa Polytechnic National University

Summary

The large-scale collaborative research initiative between the University of Portsmouth and Odesa Polytechnic National University was designed to support Ukraine's economic, social and cultural wellbeing during wartime and to contribute to post-conflict recovery. Rather than concentrating resources on a single flagship project, the initiative adopted a deliberately inclusive model maximising academic participation and interdisciplinary exchange across both institutions.

Through a joint call for proposals and a structured matching process, 26 bilateral research projects were established which were jointly led by academics from the UK and Ukraine. The projects spanned a wide range of disciplines, including infrastructure resilience and transport logistics, energy efficiency and nuclear safety, digital healthcare and medical technologies, inclusive and frugal innovation, fintech and SME recovery, education and digital learning during conflict, social vulnerability and reintegration of displaced populations, gender equality and inclusive business models, public sector innovation and governance and the protection of cultural heritage and creative practices during war.

Despite substantial operational challenges caused by the ongoing conflict (including damage to Odesa's campus) the collaboration proved highly productive. All projects were delivered on time, supported by targeted capacity-building measures for Odesa academics, such as bid-writing and research-ethics training.

Image: Dr Andrii Zharikov, University of Portsmouth.

Key outcomes include two national virtual roadshows co-hosted with the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science, alongside a substantial body of evidence-based proposals that were formally integrated into the Odesa City Economic and Social Development Strategy. In addition, the collaboration has generated a significant volume of high-quality scholarly outputs, including over 30 jointly authored articles published or under review, 10 analytical reports and dozens of presentations delivered at national and international conferences.

Looking ahead, the initiative has established strong institutional and personal partnerships, creating a robust platform for future joint research, policy engagement, funding applications as well as educational initiatives and cooperation between our institutions.

InnovateUkraine – NAS Ukraine: energy and energy efficiency collaboration

Summary

InnovateUkraine is a UK-funded programme supporting Ukraine's energy recovery, decarbonisation, and long-term resilience through the development and deployment of low-carbon technologies. The programme promotes structured collaboration between UK and Ukrainian partners to strengthen energy security and accelerate innovation uptake (https://innovateukraine.io). Within this framework, institutes of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, particularly the Institute of Electrodynamics, are engaged in a portfolio of joint research and innovation activities initiated in 2024.

The programme is delivered through interdisciplinary consortia comprising UK universities and companies, Ukrainian research institutions, industrial stakeholders, and humanitarian organisations. This model facilitates knowledge exchange, technology transfer, and co-development of scalable approaches for clean energy deployment in Ukraine.

Research focuses on advanced energy systems, including smart grids, electricity market modelling, power electronics, and digital energy management. Two flagship projects illustrate this collaboration. The OMM-Ukraine project, delivered with Innvotek Ltd and University of Hertfordshire, develops an AI-enabled platform for optimised microgrid management, improving access to reliable, secure, and low-carbon electricity in areas affected by infrastructure disruption. The METTLE project, undertaken with AceOn Group and University of Liverpool, focuses on mobile energy storage systems based on second-life electric vehicle batteries, providing resilient off-grid power during prolonged outages of critical energy infrastructure.

Despite the wartime context, the collaboration has delivered tangible outcomes. A PV station with integrated energy storage has been deployed at the Institute of Electrodynamics, enabling real-world validation of microgrid technologies and ensuring operational continuity during winter 2025–2026 power disruptions. AI-based microgrid monitoring and control systems are under testing, while portable energy storage units have been deployed in field conditions, including humanitarian distribution supported by the Ukrainian Red Cross.

Overall, the initiative has strengthened institutional capacity, enhanced applied research capability, and supported Ukraine's integration into international innovation ecosystems. Despite regulatory, financial, and operational constraints, sustained coordination with UK partners through InnovateUkraine remains critical to delivery and long-term impact.

Image: Dr Ihor Blinov, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.

Healing Kharkiv: from rubble to renewal

Summary

Healing Kharkiv: From Rubble to Renewal is a forward-looking urban regeneration project focused on restoring the Saltivka neighbourhood through a resilient, modular, and community-driven design approach. Developed in response to the Kharkiv Concept Masterplan Norman Foster Foundation competition, the project brings together a multidisciplinary team to address the urgent need for housing repair while setting a long-term vision for sustainable recovery.

The collaboration pairs international architectural and engineering design capacity with local Kharkiv knowledge and stakeholder input. Partners and collaborators include Gensler, Cundall, A. Pashenko Architectural Studio, Neo-Eco Ukraine, Never Such Innocence, Andrii Hirniak, and Renderek.

At its core, the proposal rethinks reconstruction as an opportunity to build back better, integrating circular economy principles, adaptable building systems, and enhanced public spaces. By reusing rubble from damaged buildings, the design reduces environmental impact while creating a scalable, low-carbon construction model. Prefabricated modular interventions enable rapid deployment, allowing homes to be repaired, insulated, and structurally strengthened in a flexible and cost-effective way.

Beyond physical rebuilding, the project places strong emphasis on social and cultural recovery. A network of community-focused public spaces anchored by the "Kalyna" canopy system, creates opportunities for gathering, interaction, and shared identity. These spaces are designed to support everyday life while embedding cultural references that reflect local heritage, reinforcing a sense of belonging and continuity.

Aligned with Gensler's Model for Community Impact, the project prioritises inclusivity, resilience, and long-term wellbeing. Success is measured not only through environmental and economic performance, but also through strengthened social connections, improved safety, and community engagement.

Ultimately, Healing Kharkiv offers a replicable model for post-conflict recovery, demonstrating how design can transform destruction into an opportunity for renewal, resilience, and collective healing.

Image: Priya Manoharan, Gensler.

System-level opportunities, gaps and priorities

The conference featured a series of detailed parallel roundtable discussions, with the sections below representing the findings and perspectives shared by the participants during those sessions.

UK-Ukraine science and innovation pipeline

Participants mapped UK-Ukraine research priorities, pipelines, and challenges, focusing on energy resilience, defence innovation, medicine, and reconstruction with strong Horizon Europe overlaps.

The discussion highlighted that progress from initial interest to formal collaboration has been slowed by key gaps including fragmented funding visibility, weak seed support, limited administrative capacity, and the need for closer ministerial alignment.

Key conference messages

- Research priorities typically emerge from top-down strategic signals such as ministry agendas or the UK-Ukraine 100-Year Partnership which are then reinforced by bottom-up interest from researchers and institutions. Participants identified these initial signals in industrial strategies, Department for Energy Security and Net Zero priorities, and the collaborative frameworks of Horizon Europe.
- Priorities also emerge from the ground up through researcher-led ideas and existing partnerships. These leverage Ukraine's unique context to create mutual benefits—particularly in fields like defence innovation, energy resilience, healthcare (prosthetics and mental health), and reconstruction-related research.

TABLE 1

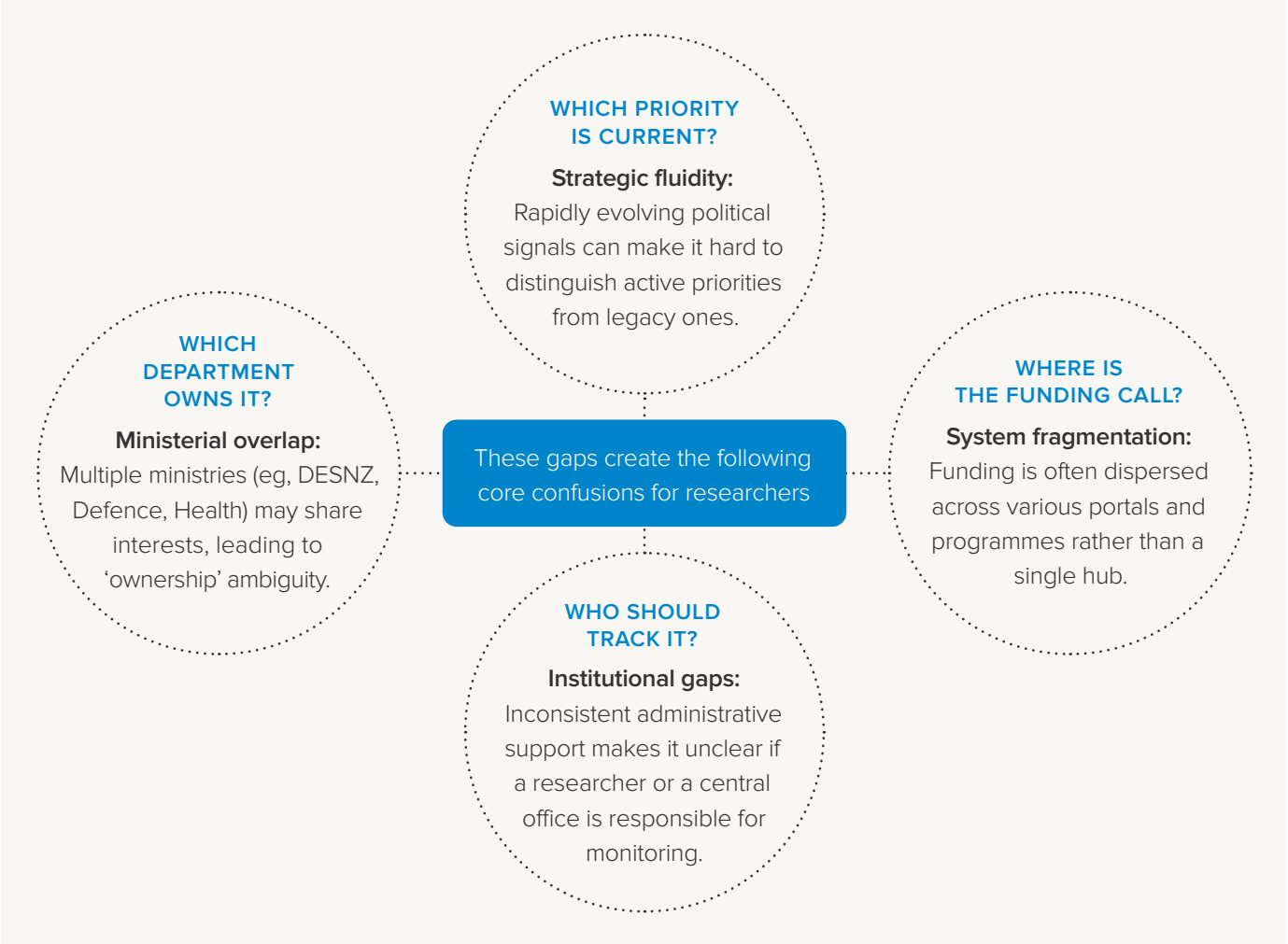
Outline of the key stages and roles of main actors, followed by a summary of the difficulties researchers face within these contexts.

Stage	Main actors	Role
Priority signal	UK and Ukrainian ministries, government departments	Define strategic direction and signal long-term commitment.
Framing and mapping	Conveners, policy leads, roundtable participants	Translate broad priorities into a system map and identify strategic overlaps.
Intermediary coordination	Universities, research offices, catapults, coordination teams	Connect stakeholders, share information, and signpost opportunities.
Matchmaking and seeding	Programme teams, research managers, funding bodies	Facilitate introductions, provide seed funding, and support early partnership formation.
Proposal building	Researchers, universities, institutional support teams	Mature joint concepts into full applications and formal consortia.
Delivery	Funded project teams, universities, businesses, public-sector partners	Executive the research or innovation activity and achieve project goals.

- **The ‘missing middle’:** Researchers face the greatest difficulty in the middle of the system, where high-level priorities must be translated into concrete funding or collaboration opportunities.
- **Fragmented landscape:** Participants noted that funding is often spread across various departments and programs, making it difficult to identify relevant, open calls.
- **Misalignment:** Coordination challenges arise when different ministerial agendas or agreements provide conflicting signals, or when a policy announcement lacks a clear, practical funding route.
- **Uneven support:** While research offices and managers are vital for navigating these hurdles, the availability and depth of this support remain inconsistent across institutions.

Three coordination gaps slow the transition from strategic signals to active research:

- **Fragmented funding visibility:** Without a centralised portal, researchers must manually scrape sporadic calls across ministries, making it difficult to respond quickly to new priorities.
- **Limited seed support and admin capacity:** A lack of starter grants and uneven institutional support particularly the need for ‘twinning’ UK and Ukrainian research offices hinders early-stage partnership building
- **Ministerial silos:** Conflicting signals and the absence of a unified map of partner institutions make it difficult to focus efforts on key strategic areas.



The role of ResearchBridge: navigating the system

ResearchBridge is uniquely positioned to introduce targeted interventions that streamline the transition from strategic signals to active research.

- **Joint funding gateway:** A single online hub under the 100-Year Partnership that aggregates all UK-Ukraine calls, seed grants, and ministerial programmes. By providing a clear 'next step' from priority to application, it eliminates the time currently lost to manual information scraping.
- **Research manager twinning:** A programme to pair UK and Ukrainian research offices for joint training and shared tracking tools. This will build administrative capacity to transform initial signals into formal partnerships quickly.
- **Aggregated partner maps:** Quarterly strategic maps focused on 2 – 5 priority areas (eg, energy resilience, defence innovation). These maps list high-capacity institutions and key contacts, allowing partners to focus their efforts on high-probability, high-impact collaborations.

Image: Conference participants.

Furthering UK-Ukraine collaboration

Participants identified what converts an initial UK-Ukraine contact into a funded, functioning research collaboration and where promising connections often stall or fail. The discussion focused on the researcher journey from first contact to active partnership, highlighting the practical barriers and the types of support that most effectively help collaborations move forward.

Key conference messages

- International collaboration is a key driver for the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF), as it provides strong evidence of research impact and often results in higher quality, more frequently cited joint publications.
- Ukraine is establishing centres of excellence and seeking international partners for joint research, training, and co-financing.

Speed, responsiveness, and flexibility are critical in the Ukrainian context.
A recurring message from Ukrainian participants was that the pace of engagement matters. In a wartime context, institutional delays and slow decision-making can slow down or hamper a collaboration entirely. While consultation and due process remain important, international partners were encouraged to work with greater urgency, responsiveness, and flexibility in order to meet immediate needs and sustain momentum.

Image: Conference participants.

Successful drivers of collaboration

Successful grassroots and community led models

- Science for Ukraine has successfully supported 800 participants through mentoring, cross supervision, PhD mobility, and Horizon Europe applications.
- Informal, researcher led consortia (eg, in computer vision) demonstrate that collaboration can be “free and fast” when stripped of hierarchy and bureaucracy.

Effective relationship building

- Strategic institutional links (eg, The University of Liverpool and Sumy State University) create smoother pathways to funding and collaboration.
- Passionate, empowered programme leads are essential for navigating UK research complexity, acting as “door-openers” who drive momentum.
- The rise of dedicated UK-partnership leads within Ukrainian institutions is significantly increasing success rates.
- Partnerships often thrive on a clear division of labor, with Ukrainian researchers providing innovative ideas and computation, while UK partners provide methodologies and resources.

Knowledge exchange and learning

- Mentoring, cross-supervision, and mobility visits have proven to be the most impactful tools for professional growth.
- Open workshops and shared exchange platforms are highly valued, particularly when they remain free and widely accessible to the research community.

Key barriers to collaboration

Regulatory and structural hurdles

- Divergent academic and regulatory frameworks between the UK and Ukraine create significant administrative friction.
- High costs and “undeliverable” visa requirements severely limit the mobility of Ukrainian researchers and stall partnership growth.
- A critical shortage of small-to-medium grants prevents new connections from scaling into long-term projects.
- Disparate approaches across UKRI councils where some recognise Ukraine as an eligible partner and others do not create.

Bureaucratic

- Formal research systems are often seen as too slow and bureaucratic, driving some researchers to bypass official channels entirely to maintain momentum.
- Twinning programmes frequently stall when they lack dedicated leadership support or the necessary administrative resourcing to function.
- Slow and uncoordinated government prioritisation makes it difficult for researchers to align their work with national strategies.
- A l ack of timely, effective dialogue between the academic community and government bodies slows down response to emerging needs.

Skills and cultural integration

- Ukrainian researchers often require targeted support to navigate the UK’s specific academic culture, particularly in professional communication, presentation, and grant writing.
- While healthy competition is standard, participants warned that it becomes harmful when it fragments the ecosystem rather than strengthening it.

Proposed solutions and interventions

Strengthening infrastructure and coordination

- Establish a central coordination hub or platform such as ResearchBridge to:
  a. Match and align researchers based on strategic priorities
  b. Document and share success stories and lessons learned from unsuccessful cases.
  c. Provide regular evidence-based reports to the UK and Ukrainian governments to guide policy.
  d. provide strategic direction.
- Develop formal mechanisms to bridge the current communication/dialogue gap between academics and public bodies.

Expanding funding opportunities

- Introduce a high-volume of small-to-medium grants to bridge the gap between initial contact and delivery.
- Harmonise UKRI eligibility rules to ensure Ukrainian researchers are recognised as eligible partners across all research councils.
- Pool smaller grants into visible, thematic 'hubs' to create more attractive entry points for industry investment.

Enabling researcher mobility

- Reduce cost and complexity of UK research visas to support free movement of scientists.

Skills development and training

- Provide targeted soft-skills training focused on communication, grant writing, and presentations to help Ukrainian researchers navigate the UK ecosystem.
- Scale up free online workshops, mirroring successful EU-wide initiatives, to reach a audience.

Leadership and culture

- Empower passionate programme leads, recognising their essential role in navigating the complex institutional systems.
- Promote non competitive, collaborative research cultures, where appropriate, that prioritises ecosystem health over individual institutional gains.

Maintaining simplicity in collaboration design

- Recognise that providing the right motivation, a clear connection, and a simple method is often more effective than top-down bureaucracy. As participants noted, simplicity is often the catalyst for speed.

Med technology partnerships

Participants mapped the pathway through which a medical technology developed in the UK and Ukraine could move from the laboratory to clinical use.

The discussion identified the critical regulatory, clinical, and funding milestones required to integrate new innovations into UK and Ukrainian hospital systems, highlighting where support is most vital for successful deployment.

Image: Conference participants.

The role of ResearchBridge

Participants discussed specific areas where UK-Ukraine cooperation could simplify the development pipeline.

Simplifying the pipeline

- **Joint training and co-creation:** Launching joint programmes in AI, digital twins, and trauma care to ensure UK research reflects Ukrainian real-world needs from the outset.
- **Medicine-engineering links:** Strengthening the bridge between clinical requirements and engineering solutions a move participants noted is essential in both countries.
- **Unified coordination:** Moving away from a fragmented landscape of isolated partnerships toward a coordinated, national network.

Practical interventions for ResearchBridge

Participants highlighted two high-impact actions for the platform to lead:

- **Matchmaking:** An agile initiative to instantly connect urgent Ukrainian clinical needs with specific UK technical expertise.
- **Train-the-trainers:** A unique initiative leveraging UK-based Ukrainian refugees to serve as linguistic and cultural bridges, accelerating knowledge transfer between systems.

The MedTech pathway: from lab to clinic

1. IDENTIFY CLINICAL NEED

Challenges:

Addressing critical shortage in specific hardware such as scanners and AI-capable diagnostic tools.

2. MATCH WITH EXTERNAL PARTNERS

Challenges:

Brokering trust and connections; for example, the link between Kharkiv National Medical University and Lancaster University was brokered by the Cormack Consultancy.

3. TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER AND TRAINING

Challenges:

Bidirectional learning: Ukrainian clinicians master UK equipment while UK teams gain insights from frontline Ukrainian trauma and emergency expertise.

Considerations for MedTech adoption

Participants identified three primary areas where regulatory, clinical, and financial hurdles can stall the transition from laboratory to hospital.

1. REGULATORY

Challenges:

Stringent processes

UK device licensing is significantly slower and more stringent than Ukrainian protocols.

Data fragmentation

Cross-border data sharing is hampered by heavy paperwork and inconsistent consent standards.

Logistics

Equipment transfer often faces long customs and regulatory delays.

2. CLINICAL VALIDATION

Challenges:

Rigorous testing

Safety trials and ethics approvals are mandatory, with the UK requiring higher levels of validation.

Iteration

Success depends on collecting and iterating real patient data.

Mental health

A unique strength is Ukraine's advanced trauma rehabilitation models, which should be integrated into clinical design.

3. FUNDING

Challenges:

High capital costs

Essential hardware (scanners/AI) remains expensive and difficult to procure.

Instability

Funding is often inconsistent, relying on short-term grants or individual champions.

Value of consortia

Large consortia are essential to improving eligibility for major programmes like Horizon Europe.

4. ETHICS AND DATA APPROVAL

Challenges:

Navigating divergent systems: Ukraine's relatively flexible system versus the UK's rigorous and specific data consent formats.

5. CLINICAL TRIALS AND ADAPTATION

Challenges:

Customisation: Engineers in Ukraine working to customise and iterate technology for individual patient requirements.

6. IMPLEMENTATION AND SCALE-UP

Challenges:

Moving beyond the pilot: Securing capital equipment, long-term engineering support, and sustainable training.

Energy security and clean technology innovation

Participants explored how UK-Ukraine research collaboration can support Ukraine's recovery, with a particular focus on energy security, sustainable reconstruction, and the development of long-term research and institutional partnerships.

Key conference messages

- Participants agreed that "support for recovery" must be understood in two complementary ways. First, it includes addressing urgent reconstruction needs arising from the destruction of energy infrastructure as a result of Russia's war, including the replacement of damaged equipment and the provision of short term solutions such as generators. Second, it encompasses longer term support for sustainable reconstruction, strengthening UK-Ukraine research partnerships, and aligning future energy system development with European standards and technologies.
- Representatives from Ukraine's National Academy of Sciences emphasised that immediate priorities remain focused on restoring basic capacity, but that longer term ambitions include the development of a more digitalised, resilient and flexible power system. This would involve engagement with grid and transmission operators, modernisation of network management, and greater integration of renewables. Ukraine's energy system was described as historically large and centralised, with nuclear power accounting for around half of electricity load, creating vulnerabilities under conflict conditions and highlighting a lack of system resilience. The loss of generation and heat capacity has underscored the need to rebalance the energy mix and explore more mobile and distributed generation solutions.

Image: Conference attendees including young Ukrainian researchers.

- There was strong consensus that Ukraine has the potential to become a future energy provider for Europe, making its reconstruction strategically important for wider European energy security. This creates a clear incentive for EU and European partners to engage, yet participants noted the absence of a clear national government plan for rebuilding the energy system, including how to move away from legacy compatibility with the Russian grid and towards European standards. Limited awareness of available European technologies and solutions was identified as a further constraint.
- The discussion highlighted tensions between short term needs and long term opportunities, centralised versus decentralised systems, and traditional replacement versus investment in modern technologies where experience may be limited and perceived reliability uncertain. These trade offs were seen as shaping government decision making, often favouring rapid replacement over transformational change. Participants stressed the importance of systems thinking, ensuring that new solutions are both targeted to immediate needs and future proofed.
- Research evidence presented by UCL illustrated how downtime and system failure affect critical services such as hospitals, reinforcing the importance of redundancy, diversity of renewable sources, and distribution level resilience. Microgrids for hospitals, schools and communities were discussed as a key pathway to improving resilience, alongside international examples such as post war Japan, where reconstruction combined immediate recovery with long term community benefit and load management.
- Participants also emphasised the wider societal dimensions of energy reconstruction. Effective solutions will need to be integrated with housing and reconstruction programmes, the construction industry, and municipalities, including the use of integrated finance models. Energy system choices were therefore seen as inseparable from urban planning, building design, and local service provision. Importantly, it was noted that the UK could also learn from Ukraine's experience, particularly in designing solutions that are usable, resilient and sustainable under extreme conditions.
- Key challenges identified included limited understanding of European regulatory standards, concentrated network distribution among a small number of companies, unclear roles between government and private sector actors, and concerns around transparency, corruption risks and greenwashing. Human centred design and detailed regulation were highlighted as essential, with examples showing that high level standards alone are insufficient without practical design expertise aligned to community needs.
- Participants identified a number of priority areas where UK-Ukraine research collaboration could add value. These included: needs assessments and options appraisals that examine short-, medium- and long-term recovery pathways; system level trade off analysis linking resilience, carbon intensity and cost; policy and regulatory tools to support government decision making; and research to de risk deployment and investment in high risk environments. Microgrids emerged as a particularly strong focus for UK research support, both as a technical solution and as part of a wider package of policy, regulatory and behavioural research to enable deployment at scale.
- Overall, participants concluded that ResearchBridge could play a valuable convening energy expertise and help incentivise analysis inputs by supporting researchers to explore evidence based, system level approaches to sustainable energy reconstruction in Ukraine. A specific focus on microgrids and distributed energy systems with policy tools, integrated finance considerations and models for partnerships across government, industry and municipalities could be a strong focus that would add value to Ukraine while delivering mutual learning benefits also for the UK.
- The UK had both architectural, construction and energy expertise that could support individual projects and the wider approach to sustainable energy as part of reconstruction.

Funding: Horizon Europe, policy routes and strategic access

Participants discussed how Ukrainian researchers currently access Horizon Europe funding and explored practical funding and policy routes for taking forward UK-Ukraine collaboration ideas, to support scalable partnerships. While the opportunities in Pillar 2 (2026 – 2027) are significant, the "barrier to entry" remains high for many Ukrainian institutions. Despite Ukraine having over 600 universities, the pool of experienced applicants remains small. Participants noted that many institutions stopped applying due to the lack of initial success.

Consortia and partnership building

Participants emphasised that the success of a consortium depends on addressing power dynamics and leadership roles early in the partnership lifecycle.

- **Ukraine as lead** There is a strategic need to move beyond Ukrainian scientists as contributors. Support should be focused on enabling Ukrainian institutions to lead consortia and serve as the primary name on grants.
- **Pre-bid funding** Funding is required to build partnerships before a formal bid is submitted. This pre-collaboration phase is essential for establishing trust and balancing power dynamics between UK and Ukrainian partners.
- **Matchmaking and portals** The value of connectivity portals and matchmaking services was highlighted as a way to identify partners across institutional and ministerial levels.
- **Leveraging platforms** Emerging organisations and platforms (eg, CrowdHelix) can assist researchers in drafting concept ideas and turning them into formal proposals.

Key findings and participant insights

Pathways to access

- **There is no standard route or typical pathway into Horizon Europe** Entry depends heavily on career stage. The journey is non-linear and often requires significant investment to produce a successful bid.

Consortia leadership

- **Ukraine as Lead** Participants emphasised that Ukrainian scientists should move from being 'contributors' to 'leads'. Pre-bid funding is essential to address power dynamics before a grant is even written.

Support infrastructure

- **The Role of NCPs** National Contact Points are vital for eligibility but are currently overstretched.
- **Research offices** There is a need to upskill 'Research Officers' within universities to handle the heavy bureaucracy.

Communication

- **Language barriers** Success rates are tied to English proficiency. Recommendations include translating Horizon calls into Ukrainian and providing specialised English courses for researchers.

The Strategic Role of National Contact Points (NCPs)

The role of NCPs was strongly emphasised as the primary gateway to eligibility and outreach. Participants noted that without this support, the collaboration process is often complex and difficult to navigate independently.

- **Eligibility vs. technicality** NCPs are most effective at helping researchers navigate eligibility reach and political momentum, rather than specific technical links.
- **Active engagement** Participants recommended regular NCP check-ins and annual calls to identify emerging barriers.
- **Reapply masterclasses** led by NCPs and attended by directors of research institutions were identified as high-value interventions for sharing good practices.
- **Capacity constraints** There is a critical need to recognise staffing issues.

Communication, language and information flow

Language remains a significant hurdle to success rates, requiring a structured approach to information dissemination.

- **Technical English** There is a pressing need for English language courses specifically geared toward the nuances of research and grant applications.
- **Translation** To increase participation, Horizon Europe calls should be translated into Ukrainian.
- **Information channels** While formal updates are needed, Facebook remains an essential informal source of information for Ukrainian researchers.
- **The Brussels Hub** The role of the Brussels Hub and its director is vital, though its effectiveness relies heavily on consistent communication flows from Kyiv.

Industry collaboration

For partnerships to be sustainable, they must bridge the gap between academia and the private sector with a focus on simplicity.

- **Clarity of value** Advice for industry collaboration highlighted by participants is to “keep it simple.” Partnerships must clearly demonstrate the industry’s role and crucially what the industry partner stands to gain.
- **Networking** Success in this sector requires active listening and networking to align research outcomes with industry needs.
- **Costs** Participants highlighted that UK partners are often paid more than Ukrainian counterparts, and that hidden costs including post-Brexit visa fees significantly drain the total pool of funds available for Ukrainian researchers.

Participants also outlined funding routes for joint research collaboration beyond Horizon Europe

- UKRI's Project Co-Lead International scheme was highlighted as a significant opportunity, allowing non-UK researchers to receive up to 30% of total project costs as international co-leads on UKRI-funded projects. This creates a practical route for Ukrainian researchers not only to participate in, but to shape and lead, collaborative projects alongside UK partners.
- Large-scale infrastructure finance presents underused opportunities for research and innovation. UK Export Finance was identified as a major but underutilised route for research-linked engagement, particularly in engineering and infrastructure delivery. While typically accessed through companies rather than researchers directly, these projects create substantial opportunities for academic collaboration where research expertise is needed to support implementation, adaptation, and delivery.
- Ukraine National Research Foundation: Funding is provided on a competitive basis to both Ukrainian and foreign researchers through bilateral agreements.
- Ukraine's new Presidential Fund pilot aims to bring foreign professors particularly from UK institutions into Ukrainian universities through short-term teaching, lectures, and specialist training. The initial focus is on critical areas including engineering, mental health, and energy security, with plans to expand to other disciplines.

Roles for ResearchBridge

- A primary challenge is building a sustainable pipeline of active participants. ResearchBridge should serve as a central coordinator, providing a clear map of who is participating, in which sectors, and at what stage. This transparency is vital for avoiding duplication and identifying underrepresented research areas.
- The consensus among participants was that ResearchBridge must facilitate ongoing networking cycles that allow for the deep relationship building rather than one-off events.
- Rather than reactive bidding, participants called for a Horizon-Planning approach. By drawing on a broad pool of expertise, ResearchBridge can set realistic expectations for what can be achieved and when.
- To manage the vast amount of data across hundreds of institutions, participants suggested leveraging AI tools for partnership mapping. This would automate the identification of existing consortia and reveal hidden players, making the matchmaking process significantly more efficient

AREAS FOR ACTION: FOR THE RESEARCHBRIDGE PROGRAMME

Participants suggested that ResearchBridge should focus on addressing the 'missing middle' between strategic intent and active collaboration by:

- Establishing a single, visible gateway aggregating UK-Ukraine funding opportunities, partnership calls, and support mechanisms and promoting offers or needs from the sector.
- Scaling matchmaking and seeding activity, including small, rapid-access grants to move partnerships from initial contact to proposal stage
- Developing targeted thematic pipelines (eg energy resilience, health, reconstruction), with partner maps and priority focus areas
- Expanding research manager twinning and institutional support, building administrative capacity on both sides to support collaboration
- Facilitating iterative engagement cycles (not one-off events), enabling partnerships to mature over time
- Providing evidence and insight to government, based on emerging partnerships and bottlenecks in the system

AREAS FOR ACTION: FOR THE UK-UKRAINE RESEARCH AND INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

Participants suggested that universities, research organisations, and intermediaries should be encouraged to:

- Move to active partner identification and engagement, using existing networks (eg twinning and TechBridge) as well as ResearchBridge as a starting point
- Embed Ukraine within existing collaboration pathways, rather than treating it as an exceptional or separate case
- Invest in skills, mentoring, and mobility support, particularly in grant writing, communication, and navigating UK systems
- Promote co-leadership models, enabling Ukrainian partners to shape agendas and lead consortia
- Strengthen links with industry and applied innovation ecosystems, particularly where there is clear demand from reconstruction and recovery
- Share models of effective collaboration, including both successes and lessons from challenges

AREAS FOR ACTION: FOR GOVERNMENT, UKRI, AND SUPPORTING AGENCIES

Participants suggested that UK government departments, UKRI, and delivery partners should consider how existing mechanisms can be adapted to better include Ukraine, including:

- Ensuring consistent eligibility for Ukrainian partners across UKRI councils and programmes
- Expanding pre bid and seed funding to support partnership formation and reduce barriers to entry
- Simplifying and reducing barriers to researcher mobility, particularly around visas and costs
- Strengthening the role of intermediaries (eg NCPs, research offices, matchmaking platforms) to actively support collaboration
- Improving visibility and coordination of funding opportunities, reducing fragmentation across departments and programmes
- Aligning research collaboration more clearly with wider strategic objectives, including energy security, resilience, and economic recovery

Acknowledgements

The Royal Society would like to thank the following individuals.

Supporting organisations

Organisations
The UK Science and Technology Network
University College London
The Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine
The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine

Conference organising committee

The Royal Society
Ian Wiggins, Director of International Affairs
James Musisi, Policy Adviser, Europe
Bijal Jagatia, International Affairs Coordinator

University College London
Danna Karayeva, UK-Ukraine ResearchBridge Manager
Martin Scott, Senior Partnerships Manager

Science and Technology Network
Martyn Cushing, Regional Manager for Central and Eastern Europe

Fund of the President of Ukraine for Education, Science and Sports
Uliana Avtonomova, Advisor

University of Southampton
Yaryna Basystyuk, Head of Public Policy

Conference speakers

Speakers
Dame Julie Maxton
Professor Chris Johnson
Minister Oleksandr Bornyakov
Deputy Minister Denys Kurbatov
Dr William Lovegrove
Sarah Lampert
Olga Budnyk
Andrew Horsley
Professor Stergios-Aristoteles Mitoulis
Dr Olena Semenenko
Dr Gemma Bowsher
Dr Andrii Zharikov
Dr Ihor Blinov
Priya Manoharan
Associate Professor Dr Anzhela Stashchack
Vivienne Stern
Des McNaulty
Professor Allison Littlejohn
Perry Guess
Micheal Browne
Perry Guess
Olena Makarenko
Dr Yuliia Lysanets
Professor Arthur Kay

Selected participants

Participants
Dr Ahmad Al-Hiari, DMU Policy Unit Lead, De Montfort University
Elena Appl, Senior International Partnerships Manager, UK Research and Innovation
Uliana Avtonomova, Advisor, Fund of the President of Ukraine for Education, Science, and Sports, Founder, Apex Talent
Chris Bagley, Director Infrastructure Programmes, Anchored In
Sam Balch, Director – UCL Grand Challenges, University College London (UCL)
Frances Ball, Deputy Programme Lead, UK-Ukraine TechBridge, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
Yaryna Basystyuk, Head of Public Policy, University of Southampton
Professor Ihor Blinov, Doctor of Engineering, Corresponding Member of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Deputy Director for research, Institute of Electrodynamics of National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine
Oleksandr Bornyakov, Minister of Digital Transformation of Ukraine
Dr Gemma Bowsher, Centre for Conflict and Health Security, King's College London
Michael Browne, CEO, CrowdHelix
Olga Budnyk, Adviser – Commissioner of the President of Ukraine on the Fund of the President of Ukraine for the Support of Education, Science and Sports, Office of the President of Ukraine
Dr Lucy Bullivant Hon FRIBA, Director, Lucy Bullivant & Associates
Allaine Cerwonka, Director of International & Associate Director of AI for Science & Government, The Alan Turing Institute
Ruhi Chitre, Policy Adviser, Asia, The Royal Society
Mick Conmy, Logistics Manager, Diamond Light Source
Eva Coulibaly-Willis, Research Associate, University College London Institute for Global Prosperity
Martyn Cushing, UK Government's Science and Technology Network (STN)
Fran Davies, Head of Global Science, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
Megan Demeritt, Europe Policy Advisor, Department of Health and Social Care
Denys Demko, Economic Secretary, Embassy of Ukraine
Ying Gao, Innovation Lead, InnovateUkraine programme
Perry Guess, Horizon Europe UK National Contact Point, Innovate UK
Kit Hardman, Senior Research Security Adviser, The Royal Society
Professor Denise Hawkes, Professor of Economics, King's College London
Andrew Horsley, Head of InnovateUkraine Programme, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Participants
Mykhailo Hrebeniuk, Manager, Global promotion of UA R&D, GUARD LLC
Professor Sergii Stirenko, Vice Rector for Research, Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute
Polly Hudson, Colouring Cities Research Programme Lead, Visiting Academic, Department of Computer Science and Technology, University of Cambridge
Bijal Jagatia, International Affairs Coordinator, The Royal Society
Professor Chris Johnson, Chief Scientific Adviser, Department for Science, Innovation and Technology
Danna Karayeva, UK-Ukraine ResearchBridge Manager, University College London
Nadiia Kasianchuk, Academic Director of MS in Bioinformatics and Biomedical Data Analysis, Kyiv School of Economics
Arthur Kay, Professor of Practice, University College London Institute for Global Prosperity
Rev. Dr Taras Khomych, Senior Lecturer in Catholic Religious Studies, Liverpool Hope University / Chairman of the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain, Liverpool Branch
Dr Peter Kolarz, Head of Programmes, Research on Research Institute
Associate-professor Oleksandr Kryvoshapka, PhD, Vice-Rector for Research and Education, Kharkiv National Medical University
Denys Kurbatov, Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine
Sarah Lampert, Ukraine Early Recovery and Reconstruction Department, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
Professor Allison Littlejohn, Professor of Learning & Technology, Pro-Vice Provost of UCL Grand Challenge (Data Empowered Societies), University College London
Dr William Lovegrove, Director of Strategic Innovation Partnerships, University College London
Dr Yuliia Lysanets, Head of the Department of International Cooperation, Research and Analytics, Fund of the President of Ukraine for Education, Science, and Sports
Olena Makarenko, Head of the expert group on Strategic Issues and Integration into the European Research Area of Science Development Directorate, Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine.
Priya Manoharan, Associate Urban Strategist, Gensler
Dr Tetyana Mayboroda, Associate Professor of Management, Deputy Head of the International Relations Office, Sumy State University
Desmond McNulty, Fellow, University of Glasgow
Dr Daniele Meunier, Clinical Scientist, Principal Scientist Global AMR, UK Health Security Agency
Professor Stergios-Aristoteles Mitoulis, Founder and Head, Centre for Global Infrastructure Resilience, The Bartlett School of Sustainable Construction, University College London

Participants
Shahid Mughal, CEO, Innvotek Ltd
James Musisi, Policy Adviser, Europe, The Royal Society
Nicola Norton, Regional Lead, Higher Education and Science, Eurasia, British Council
Dr Olga Petrovska, Teaching Fellow, Swansea University
Professor Igor Potapov, Professor of Computer Science, University of Liverpool
Sarah Qureshi, Programme Manager – EU and Four Nations, UK Health Security Agency
Dominic Rose, Head of Central and Northern Europe Engagement, DSIT
Martin Scott, Senior Partnerships Manager, University College London
Olena Semenenko, PhD, Lead Specialist, International Relations, Grant Activities and Support for International Students Office, Kharkiv National Medical University
Associate Professor Dr Anzhela Stashchak, Director for Projects, Cormack Consultancy Group
Vivienne Stern, CEO, Universities UK
Professor Richard Tomlins, Visiting Professor in Leadership and Management at Alfred Nobel University in Dnipro, Ukraine; Visiting Professor in the Urban Realm at Kyiv National University of Construction and Architecture, Ukraine
Kate Wallis, Senior Policy Manager, University College London Policy Impact Unit
Alex Weedon, Executive Director of Academic Engagement, Connected Places Catapult
Professor Sally Wheeler, Vice-Chancellor, Birkbeck, University of London
Ian Wiggins, Director of International Affairs, The Royal Society
Dr Andrii Zharikov, Associate Professor in Alternative Dispute Resolution, University of Portsmouth
Ian Wiggins, The Royal Society
Dr Andrii Zharikov, University of Portsmouth

The Royal Society

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For further information

The Royal Society
6 – 9 Carlton House Terrace
London SW1Y 5AG

T +44 20 7451 2500
W royalsociety.org

Registered Charity No 207043

Issued: July 2026 DES9536