

Transnational education strategy

2023–25



Director Education's introduction

Demand for higher education continues to grow across the world. Students and their families want to fulfil their potential. Tertiary education providers want to internationalise and raise their quality. Governments want access to higher level skills to grow their economies and play their part in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

Sending students overseas cannot meet this demand alone. Countries must increase their own capacity. Transnational education (TNE), i.e. one country offering its qualifications in another, can be an efficient and effective way to achieve this, and the UK higher education sector has been at the forefront of global growth in TNE.

The British Council supports UK TNE through working with governments and regulators overseas, to understand their priorities, and with the UK sector to see how we can help them achieve common goals. In collaboration with relevant authorities, we have worked to remove barriers to TNE and to promote new opportunities. We have now brought these activities together into a single strategy to provide increased focus and accountability to our work in this area.

This strategy builds on our knowledge and experience of what works from all countries where we have a presence, and it draws on advice from many other organisations who are active in this area and have been generous in sharing their own knowledge. This is a shared endeavour, and we look forward to playing our full part.



Maddalaine Ansell

Global Director Education, British Council

Contents

Executive summary	3
Introduction	6
The global growth of UK TNE	8
The scale of UK TNE	10
Our work in education	12
Case study: securing mutual recognition of qualifications with India	14
TNE models and approaches in an evolving landscape	15
How we support UK TNE	18
Our partners in supporting UK TNE	21
Case study: upskilling graduates in the Philippines	24
Our unique role in supporting UK TNE	25
Our vision: towards scalable, sustainable UK TNE	27
Case study: internationalising higher education in Brazil	30
Our values and guiding principles	31
Our geographical priorities	33
Case study: launching new TNE guidelines in Nigeria	35
Specific actions	36
Case study: supporting inclusive higher education in Uzbekistan	41
Monitoring and evaluation	42
Conclusion	45

Executive summary

Executive summary

This document outlines the British Council's new transnational education (TNE) strategy, which supports our aim to facilitate and develop scalable and sustainable UK transnational education globally.

The strategy builds on our knowledge and experience of supporting and enabling TNE globally. It draws on advice and feedback from our UK sector partners, in-country stakeholders and colleagues around the world.

Our strategy covers:

- how we describe and support UK TNE
- who we work with in the UK and internationally, and our role in the TNE ecosystem
- our vision for TNE and our guiding principles
- main actions to achieve our vision for TNE
- intended results of our approach to TNE.

It is aligned with:

- actions relevant to the British Council in the UK government's *International Education Strategy* (published 2019; updated 2021, 2022 and 2023)
- the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office monitoring and evaluation framework for the British Council (2021)
- recommendations from the Universities UK International (UUKi) Task and Finish Group's report on TNE (2020)
- recommendations from *The scale of UK higher education transnational education 2020–21* report, published by UUKi and the British Council (2022)
- recommendations from the British Council's Higher Education Sector Group and Going Global Partners Group (2022 and 2023)
- recommendations from BUILA-UUKi TNE members (2023).



Our strategy outlines four key actions for the next two years

Action 1

Contribute to better data and insight on UK TNE.

Action 2

Create an enabling environment for TNE in other countries and promote the quality of UK TNE internationally.

Action 3

Contribute to a better understanding of the local context and facilitate a regulatory and operational environment to best support TNE partnerships

Action 4

Support TNE, to contribute to the transformation of local education systems and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Alongside supporting our work to create and develop new opportunities for UK TNE, our strategy also aims to enhance the UK's contribution to the SDGs, by contributing to national education and learning reforms and embedding equality, diversity and inclusion across all our work.

We recognise that TNE exists in an ever-evolving higher education landscape, so we fully expect this strategy to continue to be developed over time, based on a constant review, learning and feedback process, involving UK and international partners. It will be next refreshed in December 2025.

Introduction

Introduction

The UK has a leading role in the global growth of transnational education (TNE).

According to *The scale of UK higher education transnational education 2020–21* report, published by Universities UK International (UUKi) and the British Council, the number of UK TNE students in 2020–21 totalled 510,835 across 228 countries and territories – representing record growth of 12.7 per cent.¹

Given the increasing scale and importance of TNE as a means of delivering UK education and qualifications – reflected in the UK government's *International Education Strategy*² and the *Universities UK International Strategy 2021–23*³ – as well as increasing demand from individual institutions, the British Council's role in supporting UK TNE looks set to grow. Which also means our on-the-ground presence and strong local networks and relationships will be more in demand than ever.

Our aim is to facilitate and develop scalable and sustainable UK TNE globally. To support this, we have developed a new TNE strategy.

This strategy builds on our knowledge and experience of supporting and enabling TNE globally and draws on advice and feedback from our UK sector partners, in-country stakeholders and colleagues around the world.

The strategy is aligned with:

- actions relevant to the British Council in the UK government's *International Education Strategy* (published 2019; updated 2021, 2022 and 2023)
- the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) monitoring and evaluation framework for the British Council (2021)
- recommendations from the UUKi Task and Finish Group's report on TNE⁴ (2020)
- recommendations in *The scale of UK higher education transnational education 2020–21* report, published by UUKi and the British Council (2022)
- recommendations from the British Council's Higher Education Sector Group (HESG) and Going Global Partners Group (GGPG) (2022 and 2023)
- recommendations from BUILA-UUKi TNE members (2023).

Our on-the-ground presence and strong local networks will be more in demand than ever



¹ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/scale-higher-education-transnational-education-2020-21>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-education-strategy-2022-update>

³ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/About%20UUKi/UUKi-strategy-2021-23.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/UUKi%20reports/TNE-task-and-finish-report.pdf>

The global growth of UK TNE

The global growth of UK TNE

TNE continues to grow across the world in response to the huge increase in demand for tertiary education.

As noted, UK TNE grew by a record 12.7 per cent in 2020–21, with 510,835 students studying for a UK TNE qualification overseas.⁵

Of these, 39.1 per cent were studying through collaborative provision; 30 per cent were studying through distance, flexible or distributed learning; 22.6 per cent were studying while registered at an overseas partner organisation; and seven per cent studied at overseas campuses. Students registered at an overseas partner organisation represented the largest proportional increase (+17.6 per cent) from 2019–20.

Most UK TNE students were studying for first degrees (63.8 per cent), with an additional 3.4 per cent in other undergraduate programmes and 31.4 per cent in postgraduate programmes. Students on postgraduate research programmes represented the smallest group (1.5 per cent).

There was a 56,415 increase (+21.2 per cent) in first degree students from 2016–17 to 2020–21, including a 40,045 (+33.4 per cent) increase in postgraduate students and a 1,465 (+24.6 per cent) increase in postgraduate research students.

Regionally, Asia continued to be the top host region for UK TNE students in 2020–21, catering for 252,845 students

(49.5 per cent of the global total). This was followed by the European Union (15.8 per cent), the Middle East (13.8 per cent), Africa (11.1 per cent), North America (5.3 per cent), non-EU Europe (3.4 per cent), Australasia (0.6 per cent) and South America (0.6 per cent).

The global growth of UK TNE presents both challenges and opportunities for the UK tertiary sector and its international partners, and these are accounted for in our strategy. As most TNE courses require a partnership between a UK provider and a local education organisation and must operate within a complex regulatory framework, the British Council is perfectly placed to provide support.

UK TNE grew by a record 12.7 per cent in 2020–21, with

510,835
students studying for a UK TNE qualification



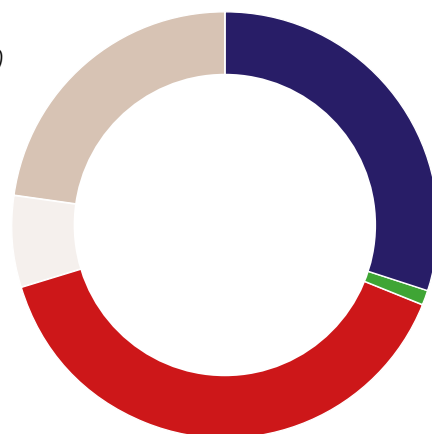
The scale of UK TNE⁶

(2020–21 academic year)

- 162 UK higher education providers reported 510,835 students learning via TNE in 228 countries and territories worldwide.
- This represents an increase of 57,445 students (+12.7 per cent) compared to 2019–20.

Types of provision

- Distance, flexible or distributed learning 153,080 **30%**
- Other arrangement 6,300 **1.2%**
- Collaborative provision 199,955 **39.1%**
- Overseas campus 35,975 **7%**
- Registered at overseas partner organisation 115,525 **22.6%**



Providers

- There were 24 more education providers offering UK TNE than in 2016–17. Six new providers were added in the last reporting year, making this the largest number of providers ever recorded.

- Ten providers reported more than 10,000 UK TNE students, and a further 17 reported between 5,000 and 10,000 students. Student numbers for providers reporting more than 5,000 students increased by 15.7 per cent from 2019–20 to 2020–21, while numbers in those with fewer than 5,000 UK TNE students increased by 7.2 per cent.
- 50.8 per cent of all UK TNE provision was reported by 15 providers.
- 136 providers each accounted for less than one per cent of UK TNE provision.
- 90 providers reported more than 1,000 TNE students, up from 82 in 2019–20.

Providers across the four nations of the UK

- Most students were reported by providers located in England (84.4 per cent). This was followed by Scotland (nine per cent), Wales (6.2 per cent) and Northern Ireland (0.3 per cent).
- 116 out of 167 providers and 17 out of 62 alternative providers in England reported TNE students. Excluding Oxford Brookes University, provision increased by 91,230 students (27.1 per cent) between 2016–17 and 2020–21.
- Three out of four providers in Northern Ireland reported TNE students. Provision increased by 230 students (16.2 per cent) between 2016–17 and 2020–21.
- 17 out of 18 providers in Scotland reported TNE students. Provision increased by 9,750 students (24.3 per cent) between 2016–17 and 2020–21.
- Nine out of nine providers in Wales reported TNE students. Provision increased by 7,245 students (29.5 per cent) between 2016–17 and 2020–21.

⁶ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/universities-uk-international/insights-and-publications/uuki-publications/scale-uk-higher-education-transnational-3>

Providers by host regions

- The number of UK TNE providers grew across all regions between 2016–17 and 2020–21. In 2020–21, the European Union hosted the largest number of UK TNE providers (147), closely followed by Asia (146) and Africa (126).
- Asia hosted 252,845 students, 49.5 per cent of the total.
- Student numbers increased the most in Asia (+25,520 students), followed by the Middle East (+11,200), between 2019–20 and 2020–21.
- Student numbers increased across all regions between 2019–20 and 2020–21, with the largest proportional increases taking place in South America (+21.9 per cent), the Middle East (+18.9 per cent) and Africa (+16.7 per cent).

Economic contribution to the UK economy⁷

- Total UK revenue from education related exports and TNE activity was estimated to be £25.6 billion in 2020, an increase of 0.8 per cent since 2019 in current prices. Since 2010, estimated UK revenue from education related exports and TNE activity has risen by 61.2 per cent in current prices.
- Total UK education related exports were estimated to be £23.3 billion in 2020 and have increased by 57.5 per cent in current prices since 2010. UK TNE activity was estimated to be £2.3 billion in 2020 and has grown by 112.9 per cent in current prices since 2010, albeit from a lower base.



**Education related
exports and TNE
activity contributed
an estimated**

£25.6 billion
**to the UK economy
in 2020**

⁷ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/uk-revenue-from-education-related-exports-and-transnational-education-activity>

Our work in education

Our work in education

As the UK's cultural relations organisation, education is a key way we build connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide. As highlighted in our *Corporate Plan 2022–23 to 2024–25*,⁸ education is highly effective in building trust and understanding, because it reaches young people at a formative stage, and these positive experiences stay with them throughout their lives. The UK's strength in education makes it an excellent partner for people-to-people, institution-to-institution, and government-to-government connections.

Through our work in education, we aim to ensure that:

- the UK's global reputation, influence and prosperity is strengthened, supporting the international ambitions of all four nations of the UK with regard to education
- leaders in overseas governments, institutions and organisations see the British Council as a long-term and trustworthy partner committed to achieving mutual benefit
- young people and influencers can transform their lives and shape a better world in partnership with the UK, through increased skills, confidence and connections
- the UK education sector can build international partnerships in places that matter to them, through improved networks, knowledge and understanding.

There is evidence⁹ that TNE helps to widen access to UK tertiary education for many more young people around the world, thereby increasing the exchange of knowledge and culture across borders. At the same time, it helps to strengthen the capacity of education systems and contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

With a longstanding overseas experience and trusted relationships with government and sector stakeholders, we have a unique role in enhancing the scale and quality of UK TNE, working closely with our UK partners, building on their strengths and adding value to their work.

Education is a key way we build connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide



⁸ https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/corporate_plan_2022-25.pdf

⁹ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/he-science/knowledge-centre/transnational-education/value-transnational-education>

Case study: securing mutual recognition of qualifications with India

Issue

After 15 years of negotiations, across two successive governments, the UK's one-year master's degree was still not recognised in India, and neither were degrees awarded from branch campuses or via transnational education (TNE).

Intervention

We worked with the UK government on a new set of negotiations with India, with the aim of securing a mutual recognition of qualifications (MRQ) agreement, which could lead to enhanced TNE opportunities.

Results

A UK-India MRQ, signed on 21 July 2022, between the UK and India, recognising the UK's one-year master's qualification, as well as UK qualifications from branch campuses in other countries, such as Malaysia and Dubai.

A raft of new TNE partnerships between the UK and India and increased confidence of both countries to collaborate.

Direct support of the Enhanced Trade Partnership and 2030 Roadmap, by enhancing co-operation, while fulfilling the ambitions of the UK's *International Education Strategy* and India's National Education Policy to increase education exports, diversify student recruitment and support the transfer of skills.

Next steps

In collaboration with ENIC and AIU, we are now working to establish a quality-assurance process for digital and distance-learning TNE courses.



TNE models and approaches in an evolving landscape

TNE models and approaches in an evolving landscape

For the purpose of this strategy, **‘UK TNE’ refers to UK tertiary qualifications delivered outside of the UK.**

These include all types of formally recognised academic awards, such as degrees, diplomas and certificates granted by tertiary education institutions on successful completion of a programme of study, including:

- higher education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) awards
- professional awards
- micro-credentials¹⁰ or certificates of learning outcomes from short-term learning experiences (including certified short courses and training).

There are four common award models.

Validation: where an overseas partner designs their own programme, but the award is from the UK institution.

Franchise: where a UK institution’s programme is run by an overseas partner in the same way it would be delivered in the UK.

Joint award: where the award is given jointly by two (or more) institutions.

Dual (or double) award: where an award is given by both the UK institution and one or more partners.

Current and emerging delivery models

There are several ways in which UK TNE is delivered, and providers often use a variety of terms to describe similar or even identical models of TNE activity. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)¹¹ recently recognised the British Council’s classification framework¹² as an effective reference point for capturing the breadth of TNE provision.

TNE is commonly delivered through four delivery models, which have been accepted by the UK’s overseas partners.

In-country/flying faculty: where staff from the UK institution deliver courses internationally, usually in intensive blocks.

Distance learning: where learners study a UK programme remotely, through online resources and virtual learning environments (VLEs).

Blended delivery: where courses are delivered using a combination of flying faculty from the UK institution, tutorial support from a local partner and online learning, usually via the UK institution’s VLE.

International campus: where a UK institution has an international campus that closely mirrors its provision in the UK. If an overseas partner institution is involved, collaborative models may apply (e.g. joint award).

Emerging TNE models and approaches can provide greater accessibility and flexibility to learners and enable institutions to expand their global reach



¹⁰ Micro credentials – often referred to as alternative or non-degree credentials – describe education that falls between courses and degrees, including certificates, digital badges, licences and apprenticeships, with the latter equating to full qualifications in Europe.

¹¹ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/blog/09-08-2023/transnational-higher-education-redefining-type>

¹² https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/tne_classification_framework-final.pdf

There are also a range of emerging delivery models.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs): where large numbers of learners study an online course at the same time, offering the opportunity for students from different countries to participate in one course simultaneously.

Virtual mobility and online international learning: where technology is used to provide students with a virtual international learning experience, including online collaboration with students from other countries, virtual study abroad programmes and cross-cultural training.

Work-integrated learning: where work experience forms part of educational programmes, enabling students to gain practical skills and real-world experience while studying.

Personalised learning: where data and analytics are used to tailor educational programmes to the needs and preferences of individual learners, providing a more personalised learning experience.

Micro/nano-credentials: mini qualifications for individuals to learn new skills, progress in their careers or change careers entirely. Usually in the form of on-demand, online courses, they are designed to be fast, accessible and specialised, and provide a certification upon completion.

These emerging models, alongside new models and approaches, are likely to become more prevalent in the coming years, as educational institutions seek to meet the changing needs of learners and adapt to the evolving global education landscape.

We recognise that emerging TNE models and approaches aim to provide greater accessibility and flexibility to learners of varying ages and backgrounds, while also offering new opportunities for institutions to expand their reach globally. Our strategy is supportive of these new approaches, including blended and mixed modes of TNE provision.



How we support UK TNE

How we support UK TNE

Within the context of the growing internationalisation of UK higher education, we have supported UK TNE over many years. This has included working alongside UK and overseas governments and tertiary education providers across the full range of delivery models, from branch campuses to fully online courses and credentials.

Under Action 9 of the UK government's 2021 *International Education Strategy*,¹³ we have partnered with the Department for Education and the Department for Business and Trade to influence policymakers to remove market barriers, and to support the establishment of system-level agreements, such as mutual recognition of qualifications (MRQ) and memoranda of understanding (MoUs).

This has led to the signing of bilateral, government-to-government agreements in India, Brazil, Nigeria and Vietnam, all of which will pave the way for UK education providers to offer TNE programmes with local partners. Through our Pakistan UK-Education Gateway, a new and practical handbook for TNE has also been approved by Pakistan's Higher Education Commission, creating new opportunities for TNE partnerships.

At the same time, we have created an enabling environment for long-term collaboration, by:

- raising awareness, in-country, of the quality and flexibility of UK TNE, and promoting the strengths of UK TNE provision with local partners
- working with UK and international stakeholders to develop internationalisation strategies and action plans, and to identify partners, through inward/outward scoping missions and by connecting relevant networks
- strengthening capabilities to enhance the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in preparation for TNE partnerships
- funding collaborative teaching and research partnerships in areas of shared interest relating to the SDGs, such as gender equality, public health and inclusive economic growth.

Our Going Global Partnerships programme¹⁴ has so far funded 105 partnerships focused on developing TNE programmes.

Our global research has contributed new knowledge on TNE to benefit the UK sector and international partner countries. For example, our report on *The environment for transnational education partnerships and UK qualifications: challenges and opportunities*,¹⁵ published in 2022, along with 16 in-depth country studies, provides a comprehensive analysis of the TNE operating environment, as well as recommendations for institutions, regulatory bodies and governments.

Our Going Global Partnerships programme has so far funded

105

partnerships focused on developing TNE

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-education-strategy-2022-update/international-education-strategy-2022-progress-update>

¹⁴ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/he-science/going-global-partnerships>

¹⁵ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/he-science/knowledge-centre/transnational-education/environment-international-education>

Our complementary research¹⁶ on the value of TNE provides evidence of its direct contribution to the SDGs. Alongside its substantial contribution to Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education (SDG4), TNE can act as a catalyst for impact across other SDGs, such as Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), Gender Equality (SDG 5) and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17).

In partnership with UUKi, we produced the sixth edition of *The scale of higher education transnational education 2020–21* report,¹⁷ which provides regional analyses of UK TNE provision globally during the 2020–21 academic year. Findings suggest that, while there was significant TNE growth during the Covid-19 pandemic, more needs to be done to achieve the long-term goal of scalable, sustainable and secure UK TNE growth.



¹⁶ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/he-science/knowledge-centre/transnational-education/value-transnational-education>

¹⁷ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/scale-higher-education-transnational-education-2020-21>

Our partners in supporting UK TNE

Our partners in supporting UK TNE

We work with a range of UK and international partners towards our vision of scalable and sustainable UK TNE.

In the UK, we collaborate closely with the UK government, the education departments in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, tertiary education providers, membership organisations and intermediary agencies.

Internationally, we collaborate with government stakeholders, intermediary organisations and tertiary education providers, including ministries of education, regulators and authorities representing policy, networks, professional and membership agencies and regional and national representative bodies.

We acknowledge and respect our partners' role across different aspects of UK TNE development and delivery. We will continue to be sensitive to this to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication of effort.



Below is a sample representation of our strategic and implementation partners in the UK.

Our UK partners

Government and education departments, regulators and funding agencies in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales

They support with policy, regulation and financing, co-funding, facilitating government-to-government engagement, developing MoUs and MRQs, joint country planning, co-hosting events, inward/inward missions and delegations to the UK and overseas.

Membership organisations and intermediary agencies

UK tertiary education stakeholders, including UUKi, Universities Scotland, Universities Wales, Universities Ireland (UI), QAA Scotland, QAA NI, QAA Wales, Jisc, Advance HE, QAA, UK ENIC/Ecctis and others.

They support with quality, insight, peer review, monitoring, connections and best practice.

Tertiary education providers and networks

UK higher education/TVET institutions, associations, consortia and networks, including BUILA, Russell Group, Universities Alliance, NCUK, Independent HE, Guild HE, Million Plus and others.

They support with quality, internationalisation, governance, diversity and assessment.



Case study: upskilling graduates in the Philippines

Issue

Many of the expertise gaps required to fulfil the Philippine's ambitious economic recovery agenda are either not widely offered or unavailable in local universities, including emerging disciplines deemed critical for national development. The lack of opportunities to specialise in these growth areas is hindering the development of future-ready graduates.

Intervention

Since 2016, we have worked with the Philippines Higher Education Commission to benefit all levels of higher education.

At the individual level, we have supported the professional development of local faculties to specialise in niche disciplines through a scholarship scheme for transnational education (TNE) programmes.

At the institutional level, we have brokered partnerships between UK and local universities to co-create academic programmes in specialist or in-demand subject areas, enabling local universities to strengthen their capacity and expertise to offer innovative programmes.

At the system level, we have collaborated with the Philippines government to shape policies and the regulatory environment by using first-hand experience in developing UK-Philippines TNE and showcasing the best of the UK.

Results

A new TNE law and strategy, along with guidelines for graduate education and quality assurance metrics for internationalisation. This will help to open doors for the UK to partner with the Second Congressional Commission on Education to support major education reforms across the country.

Introduction of graduate programmes in data science, robotics, food sustainability, international public health and oceanography. This enables young people to contribute to the local economy and so reduces the brain drain.



Our unique role in supporting UK TNE

Our unique role in supporting UK TNE

Given the UK higher education sector's ambition to grow TNE, and the momentum generated by International Education Champion Sir Steve Smith, we are prepared to have a stronger role in supporting UK TNE as our global reach, local knowledge and insight, and access to governments and sector partners become even more in demand.

Our new TNE strategy supports this enhanced role, by detailing our focus for the next two years, drawing on our global understanding, experience and learning.

The strategy builds on advice and feedback from partners and stakeholders, while drawing on our body of research and evidence on TNE development, generated over recent years. The strategy also builds on our strengths and track record as an organisation.

Our strengths

The following areas have been highlighted by our UK and international partners as our key strengths.

Our **trusted position and strong reputation** in local country contexts, where we have worked in partnership for mutual benefit with governments and sector stakeholders for many years and are often their first point of contact when connecting with the UK.

Our **knowledgeable and respected in-country colleagues** with excellent networks, who can offer

insight and advice on local English and education systems and identify potential partners. Our local leadership teams sit on advisory boards, steering committees and task forces in many countries that influence the TNE landscape.

Our **global sector knowledge and connections**, on-the-ground presence and market insight in over 100 countries, which gives us access to a unique network of experts, and enables us to work at scale, amplifying impact for the UK.

Our **convening power** and strong reputation, which enables us to bring individuals, institutions and governments together to scope out partnerships and connect with the UK by facilitating regular inward and outward missions, including supporting Professor Sir Steve Smith. We attract ministerial and high-level sector delegations from across the world to events, including the Going Global conference series and the Education World Forum.

Our **responsiveness and ability to adapt** our approach to new or unexpected circumstances, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and times of conflict.

With our global presence and connections around the world, we believe our unique role supports and complements the efforts of UK governments, embassies and sector partners in support of UK TNE.

**Our vision:
towards scalable,
sustainable UK TNE**

Our vision: towards scalable, sustainable UK TNE

The scale of UK higher education transnational education 2020–21 report,¹⁸ published by UUKi and the British Council, concludes that UK higher education institutions ‘must be ready for unexpected changes in the operating environment of countries through a sophisticated international function and will require strong support from government, the British Council and UUKi to continue to develop scalable and sustainable TNE in the future.’

While choosing to align the ambition of our strategy – **to facilitate and develop scalable and sustainable UK TNE globally** – with our partners at UUKi and across the wider sector, we acknowledge that definitions of these terms differ from context to context and will continue to change over time. For this reason, we’ve given our own definitions below, drawing on our interpretation of work done by others.

By ‘**scalable**’, we mean TNE programmes that can be expanded after an initial pilot phase to reach significant numbers of students and widen access to in-demand subjects. Such programmes, while tailored to specific contexts and countries, are likely to be replicable in others.

By ‘**sustainable**’, we mean TNE programmes that ‘meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (United Nations Brundtland Commission¹⁹).

We also understand ‘sustainable’ to mean programmes that align with the description of ‘sustainable development’ by Advance HE and QAA,²⁰ as an aspirational, ongoing process of addressing social, environmental and economic concerns to create a better world.

Our research into the value of TNE provides evidence that TNE programmes significantly contribute to the SDGs, most notably Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education (SDG4). They also can act as a catalyst for achieving impact across other SDGs, such as Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), Gender Equality (SDG 5) and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17).

Sustainable TNE partnerships must be based on a set of core principles and must be equitable, benefiting both the UK and local partner.



¹⁸ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/universities-uk-international/insights-and-publications/uuki-publications/scale-uk-higher-education-transnational-3>

¹⁹ <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>

²⁰ https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/advance-he/education-for-sustainable-development-guidance-executive-summary_1616774751.pdf

Below are the key principles that underpin our approach.

We will help develop and facilitate equitable partnerships that:

- are founded in a shared vision for success
- work for mutual benefit
- build respect and trust between the partners
- promote inclusivity and diversity
- encourage sustainability and long-term impact
- embed accountability and transparency
- develop capacity in each partner and learn from each other
- adhere to regulatory compliance and ethical practices
- co-create curricula that are relevant to local contexts
- allocate resources for continuous evaluation and improvement during development and implementation.

This is not an exhaustive list, and we welcome future efforts to further refine it.

We recognise that not all partnerships will be scalable and sustainable, and it is inevitable that many will not go beyond the pilot stage. Others may work for several years and then be terminated by mutual consent. In such cases, there still could be benefits in terms of sustainability. For example, the partnership could evolve into a different type of partnership, or it could generate learning about how to approach TNE that can be shared across the sector.



Case study: internationalising higher education in Brazil

Issue

Upon returning to Brazil, students with higher education qualifications from non-Brazilian institutions, particularly those with UK masters' degrees, face an extremely lengthy processes of recognition. Recent years have also seen reduced funding to promote the internationalisation of higher education, meaning transnational education (TNE) is in a relatively early stage of development.

Intervention

In 2021, we led conversations with Brazil's previous government, supported by the UK's Department for Business and Trade and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, to assess the possibility of a mutual recognition of qualifications (MRQ) agreement between Brazil and the UK.

Results

A memorandum of understanding to formalise interest in co-operating, with a priority on internationalisation and the possibility of opening a formal forum for MRQ negotiations.

A new Internationalisation Working Group, set up by the Brazilian Ministry of Education, the British Council and the British Embassy in Brazil, who will continue to engage with the new Brazilian government.

Next steps

Successful implementation of HE Connects grants between Brazil, Mexico and the UK to encourage TNE partnerships.

Commissioning technical assistance services in Brazil, Mexico and Peru, to strengthen the capacity of policymakers, higher education institution leaders and staff with regard to internationalisation, focusing on MRQ engagement and TNE partnership development.

Sharing and dissemination of TNE research findings with relevant UK and local stakeholders.



Our values and guiding principles

Our values and guiding principles

The following guiding principles for implementing our TNE strategy are informed by our organisational values.

Optimistic and bold: sharpening our focus, clarifying our role, and identifying new opportunities for growth.

We will continue to support the four governments of the UK and the tertiary education sector to achieve their global ambitions, connecting them with international institutions and sectors and building confidence and trust with regard to UK TNE.

We will be co-ordinated in planning and delivering country action plans, agree our role alongside UK government and sector partners, and monitor progress against agreed roadmaps and action plans.

We will conduct new research and insight with partners and stakeholders and share this with the international community, to help grow the scale and impact of UK TNE.

Expert and inclusive: deepening our commitment to embedding equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in our work.

We will continue to provide expert advice and insight to the UK and overseas sectors to help support the growth and impact of UK TNE, while embedding good EDI practices.

We will continue to highlight the positive impact of TNE, and its contribution to the SDGs.

We will continue to embed EDI in our own internal policies and practices, and through our programmes, prioritising gender equality, anti-racism and disability inclusion.

Open and committed: developing our knowledge, capability and connections, and growing through continuous learning.

We will build our own capability, while supporting individuals, institutions and systems to grow UK TNE. We will be guided by data and evidence and evolve by regularly evaluating our role, responding to feedback on our contribution and learning from this.

We will resource ourselves based around the strategic priority countries outlined in the UK government's *International Education Strategy* and the four nations of the UK, strengthening our knowledge, expertise and relationships in these countries, and identifying opportunities for growth.



Our geographical priorities

Our geographical priorities

We will align our work in TNE with the priority countries for growth in UK education exports, as set out in the UK government's *International Education Strategy*.²¹

These immediate priority countries are India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam and Nigeria.

Our other priority markets include Brazil, Mexico, Pakistan, Europe, China and Hong Kong.

The Global Wales programme²² provides a strategic, collaborative approach to international higher education and further education in Wales. It is a partnership between Universities Wales, Colegau Cymru, the Welsh Government, British Council Wales and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.

Global Wales has four priority markets: Europe, North America, India and Vietnam.

During the development of its new education strategy, the Scottish Government²³ has identified several priority countries, including the top sending countries for higher education students in Scotland, the top countries for international collaborative research and the top countries for TNE enrolments.

In Northern Ireland, we will continue to work with our partners and align our efforts to support their priority markets for TNE.

Beyond the priority countries outlined above, we will also support new and emerging markets where there are opportunities for growth in TNE, working closely with UK and international partners.

The balance between priority countries and emerging markets is an important one to consider. We will develop a layered resourcing model to balance efforts and resources across different geographies, ensuring support is proportionate to sector priorities and can achieve scale and sustainability.



²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-education-strategy-2022-update/international-education-strategy-2022-progress-update>

²² <https://uniswales.ac.uk/our-work/global-wales>

²³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotland-a-trading-nation/sectors/education-tourism-and-creative-industries/>

Case study: launching new TNE guidelines in Nigeria

Issue

The absence of well-defined policies and regulatory clarity regarding the establishment of transnational education (TNE) partnerships in Nigeria was a source of concern within the UK sector, impacting the number of international collaborations in Nigeria.

Intervention

We supported a collaboration between the UK government, represented by International Education Champion Sir Steve Smith, and the National Universities Commission in Nigeria, to oversee the development of new guidelines for TNE partnerships.

This involved a comprehensive quality review of the existing national guidelines, providing support on UK missions to Nigeria to further strengthen UK TNE, and helping to establish a joint government working group to facilitate stronger UK-Nigeria partnerships.

Results

The launch of a new set of comprehensive TNE guidelines, which include case studies of potential workable models for the development of future partnerships.

A roundtable discussion to increase understanding of the regulatory requirements for the development of partnerships among various stakeholder groups.

Increased buy-in from government to support an enabling policy environment for the development of international partnerships.

Next steps

Inward missions aimed at promoting direct interactions between stakeholders from both nations interested in advancing TNE partnerships.

New research, insight and grants to help develop and create an enabling environment for the growth of UK TNE in Nigeria.

Incorporating TNE as a major theme at Going Global 2024 in Nigeria.

Specific actions

Specific actions

Below are the key actions we will take over the next two years, aligned with key policy documents and recommendations for enabling scalable and sustainable UK TNE.

Action 1



Contribute to better data and insight on UK TNE

- We will consolidate our research and insight on TNE into an easily accessible repository of knowledge, in collaboration with our partners in the UK and overseas.
- We will continue to produce targeted research on the environment for TNE in priority countries for the four nations of the UK, to add to the 16 country reports already completed. Reports on Egypt, Central Asia, the South Caucasus and Western Balkans, Vietnam, Brazil and Mexico are all scheduled to be published in late 2023.
- We will commission a report to develop a framework for assessing and describing global TNE. This will provide insights into the competitive environment for TNE and situate UK TNE in the overall global landscape.
- We will continue to convene global events and webinars on TNE and contribute to partner events. TNE will be presented as a major theme in our Going Global conference series and Deep Dialogues 2023–24 events. We will work with our UK and global partners to shape and curate these discussions.
- We aim to attract over 150,000 UK alumni onto our global UK Alumni platform, including UK TNE alumni. This database has the potential to be a valuable source of information for the sector on the characteristics of TNE students, their experience and employment outcomes.
- We will partner with relevant agencies to develop survey tools that can enrich data on UK TNE students and provide valuable intelligence to UK providers.
- We will support UK providers and sector bodies to map out UK TNE provision globally, so that the scale, diversity and range of courses offered at the country and global levels are clear. This includes promotion of a variety of courses including blended (2+2, 3+1, etc.) models that encourage learners to spend some time in the UK.
- We will work closely with our international partners and stakeholders and share insight and evidence about the UK sector with them.
- We will review and refresh our communication channels and platforms, including content, to make it more easily accessible to the UK sector and international audiences.

Action 2



Create an enabling environment and promote the quality of UK TNE internationally

- We will work with local ministries of education and local sector stakeholders to help them understand the UK's quality assurance systems and provide them with up-to-date information, working with relevant UK agencies. This will support the acceptance of UK TNE globally.
- We will further strengthen our own knowledge and experience of UK TNE and MRQs through focused training and development for our teams in the UK and overseas, who work across the sector. This will also help to improve the quality of support and advice we provide to our partners.
- We will support the sector in priority countries to navigate complex overseas operating environments throughout the lifecycle of UK TNE. This will include developing, maintaining and facilitating closure (where relevant) of partnerships.
- We will work in partnership with the sector in the UK and in partner countries to host information on our websites and web platforms about TNE characteristics and outcomes, as well as case studies of successful programmes that emphasise flexibility, employability and positive outcomes.
- Alongside our UK partners, we will begin to promote transnational online higher education in focused promotional campaigns as a distinct activity, informed by data and key messages on its unique value proposition.
- We will continue to work with our partners and stakeholders to create awareness of UK TNE, and work with them to create a supportive environment for the development and growth of relevant programmes and partnerships.
- We will work with partners in the UK and overseas to enhance awareness around risk management. This includes our role in facilitating and supporting the development of risk and financial frameworks that help partners involved in TNE development and provision.
- We will actively recruit UK TNE alumni onto the Alumni UK platform and promote successful case studies on our websites. TNE alumni will also have opportunities to take part in the prestigious annual Study UK Alumni Awards.
- We will continue to fund partnerships with the potential to lead to TNE growth in priority countries.
- We will work with the UK tertiary education sector and relevant overseas stakeholders to help create and support a community of practice for TNE advice, support and facilitation, that is relevant and applicable in local settings.
- Because many TNE programmes are delivered in English, we will encourage language-aware and language-sensitive TNE policies and practices.²⁴
- We will identify large scale opportunities for UK tertiary education providers to work together for wider impact. This may include involving more than one partner in partnerships and engaging networks, consortia and allies to create a collaborative space for the growth of scalable and sustainable UK TNE.

²⁴ Veitch, A. 2021. English in higher education – English medium. Part 2: A British Council perspective. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/HE_EME_Perspective_part_2v1.pdf

Action 3



Contribute to a better understanding of the local context and facilitate a regulatory and operational environment to best support TNE partnerships

- We will continue to work with the UK International Education Champion and government partners across the UK to engage in dialogue with priority countries with regard to supporting regulatory environments and working towards international agreements (MOUs and MRQs). These agreements²⁵ may cover the recognition of UK degrees, including online and blended learning programmes.²⁶
- We will work with our UK and global partners to encourage diversification of UK TNE provision. This includes helping to increase the scale and impact of postgraduate TNE qualifications, particularly research degrees, by helping to address the barriers to research qualifications – an area currently in need of further support and facilitation.
- We will work with our global partners to provide insights around financial and regulatory environments in selected countries. This includes developing and sharing frameworks and guidance around due diligence and risk management that lead to scalable and sustainable UK TNE.
- We will strengthen our and our partners' understanding and capacity to be able to provide timely and appropriate advice and guidance to the sector in the UK and overseas.
- We will support the sector to develop TNE partnerships into wider and deeper opportunities, including conducting joint research and connecting with local industries and employers.
- We will continue to co-ordinate inward and outward delegations to the UK in support of system-to-system and institution-to-institution engagement in these countries, supporting new connections leading to growth in UK TNE.
- We will continue our online offer of Internationalising Learning Cohorts, which aim to strengthen the skills of overseas partners to develop and manage UK TNE. We will also engage local partners in shaping the next iterations of these cohorts, based on their needs.
- We will support countries where we identify potential for future growth aligned with our TNE model and market insight reports.
- Through our English programmes, we will continue to support teachers, teacher educators and learners in basic education to build and develop their English language skills and abilities, enabling them to better access UK TNE opportunities.
- We will work with our partners in the UK and overseas to help convene spaces and opportunities for information sharing, mutual learning and developing collective capacity for long-term, scalable impact. This includes making our insights easily available, developing communities of practice and sharing opportunities for collective growth.

²⁵ In most cases, the British Council does not control the content, terms and conditions of the agreements.

²⁶ Highest priority countries over the next two years will be: India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Pakistan, Mexico, Brazil, France and Germany.

Action 4



Support TNE to contribute to the transformation of local education systems and contribute to the SDGs

- We will aim to embed equality, diversity and inclusion across all of our partnership activities, including looking at the social impact of TNE for all partners involved in delivering programmes.
- We will continue to fund initiatives that strengthen tertiary education capability and enhance the quality of higher education and TVET systems, paving the way for TNE partnerships that can widen access to tertiary education for disadvantaged, less privileged and excluded individuals and communities.
- Through our activities and projects in the UK and overseas, we will work with relevant partners to help diversify UK TNE provision. This includes expanding the UK TNE base beyond usual players, thereby widening access to learners, institutions and partners.
- We will continue to work with national and state systems to support the development of local standards and systems, and to shape policy.
- We will support the co-creation of curricula that are inclusive, modern and global, and that are relevant to and embedded in the local context and environment, while maintaining quality.
- We will facilitate access to and develop the capacity of research courses, to help grow UK TNE at the PhD and postgraduate research levels.
- We will fund partnerships on themes of shared interest relating to the SDGs, including gender equality, public health, disability inclusion and inclusive economic growth.
- We will continue to work with national and state systems to support local standards and mechanisms that are committed to addressing local issues and utilise UK TNE to facilitate local and national reforms.
- We will develop and provide insight and create awareness around the social impact of TNE in the UK and globally.
- We will work with our partners in the UK and overseas sectors to create a community of practice supporting the impact of TNE.
- We will work with all relevant partners in the UK and overseas to help improve the perceptions and understanding of TNE programmes. This includes sharing a realistic perspective of TNE provision (for example, TNE courses will not have the same immersive experience as studying in the UK).
- We will work closely with our international partners to be informed of sector needs, challenges and opportunities, and provide advice that is supportive of local national ambitions and strengthens local capacity and talent.

We recognise that our partners and stakeholders are also working hard to take forward many of these actions. Through effective communication and planning, we will make sure our own efforts complement theirs, to avoid duplication.

Case study: supporting inclusive higher education in Uzbekistan

Need

To support Uzbekistan's strategic priority of widening higher education access, particularly for those with disabilities, those from low-income families and women and girls, there was a need to shape understanding around 'inclusive universities' and how to implement inclusive practices, while establishing a network of stakeholders to enable sustainable change.

Intervention

We worked with the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovations of the Republic of Uzbekistan, as well as some of Uzbekistan's current UK transnational education partners, including Westminster International University in Tashkent and the University of Westminster, to launch an Inclusive University initiative.

This included a conference to explore issues related to women's empowerment and girls' education, and access to education for people with disabilities and those from low-income families.

Results

Establishment of a national Inclusive University Working Group, under the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovations of the Republic of Uzbekistan, to share good practice and co-ordinate work to enhance inclusive higher education provision, with a focus on embedding inclusion in university strategies, shaping a more inclusive curriculum and providing more relevant student support.

The mapping of Inclusive University stakeholders in Uzbekistan and internationally against the key areas of inclusive strategy, inclusive curriculum and student support.

Next steps

Development of a Good Practice Guide to support and champion inclusion in higher education, which will outline priority areas to develop and enhance inclusive higher education, provide guidance and tools for implementation, and share national and international best practices around inclusive higher education.

Launch the guide at a conference for all major higher education reform stakeholders from Uzbekistan and the UK, to support discussions around how universities and university collaborations act as engines for positive change.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation

Our TNE strategy emphasises the importance of tracking the progress of our interventions and assessing the impact of our work. We will develop a time-bound, milestone-focused plan, based on these actions, which will be monitored and evaluated over the next two years of implementation. The learning from this will be incorporated into the next iteration of our strategy.

Through our Going Global Partnerships programme, we developed an overarching theory of change and evaluation framework to support sustainable and scalable UK TNE. This incorporates the objectives set out in our FCDO KPIs and *International Education Strategy*, as well as our commitment to achieving development outcomes and embedding equality, diversity and inclusion across our work.

Our impact will be measured through quantitative and qualitative methodologies. We will allocate resources to evaluate our role and contributions through stakeholder feedback, external evaluations and impact assessments.

Below is a non-exhaustive list of our key performance indicators.

Quantitative measures

- Number of UK and overseas higher education and TVET organisations we have funded to initiate TNE partnerships, including the distribution of institutions across all four nations of the UK.
- Number of UK and overseas higher education and TVET organisations we are supporting, excluding funding, to initiate and develop TNE partnerships.
- Number of institutional agreements signed formalising TNE arrangements, where we have supported the journey.
- Number of new TNE programmes and courses initiated due to our support in *International Education Strategy* priority countries.
- Number of jurisdictions accepting UK qualifications with our support.
- Number of research, evidence and insight papers we publish that promote and support UK TNE.
- Evidence of major thematic discussions and dialogues we curate, participate in or facilitate that support UK TNE. These may include key sessions involving our senior leadership.
- Evidence of materials and resources we commission and develop to promote understanding of the UK TNE.
- Number of capacity building sessions and interactions with colleagues in the UK and overseas.



Qualitative measures

- Evidence of our contribution to identifying and removing market barriers.
- Evidence of our contribution to new system-to-system agreements.
- Evidence of our contribution in creating an enabling environment for the UK TNE and MRQs.
- Evidence of the contribution of our programmes and support to fostering long-term TNE programmes that contribute to the SDGs
- Evidence of the social and economic value of UK TNE, including data covering equality, diversity and inclusion, especially around gender and disability inclusion.
- Evidence on how our engagement with the sector in the UK and overseas has contributed to their understanding of TNE.
- Reports, working papers and publications demonstrating our support and contribution for UK TNE in the UK and overseas.
- Evidence of developing effective information sharing platforms/resources around UK TNE. This may include linking and working across all relevant British Council programmes, for example, English, Study UK and Alumni UK enabling cross-programme synergies supporting diverse UK TNE audiences.



Building on these key indicators, we will refine our internal monitoring and evaluation tools and systems. While delivering this strategy, we will listen to our partners and continue to incorporate the feedback and advice of our stakeholders and external advisory boards in improving the monitoring and evaluation of our actions.

Conclusion

Conclusion

Our new TNE strategy has been developed within the context of the increasing scale and importance of TNE as a means of delivering UK education and qualifications, as well as increasing demand for our support in achieving this.

The strategy draws on our global understanding, experience and learning of supporting and enabling TNE. It acknowledges past and current perceptions about UK TNE, as seen by different stakeholders in varying contexts. It acknowledges the key strengths and limitations of UK TNE provision and aims to ensure we deliver on expectations in the UK government's *International Education Strategy*, while aligning our efforts closely with the four governments and sectors of the UK.

While implementing this strategy, we will continue to listen to our overseas stakeholders and refine our actions and plans to align with their needs and objectives.

Alongside creating and developing new opportunities for UK TNE, we will aim to enhance the UK's contribution to the SDGs, support the development of national education systems and embed equality, diversity and inclusion across all of our work.

We recognise that TNE exists in an ever-evolving higher education landscape, so we fully expect this strategy to continue to be developed over time, based on a constant review, learning and feedback process, involving UK and international partners.

This strategy will be refreshed in December 2025.



www.britishcouncil.org/education/he-science/knowledge-centre/transnational-education

Contact us

Dr Nishat Riaz MBE, Head of HE Systems & Internationalisation
and Global lead for TNE, British Council

nishat.riaz@britishcouncil.org.pk