

BDS MOVEMENT | UCL

UCL Ties with Israeli Universities

UCL has direct, extensive and fully normalised institutional relationships with several Israeli universities.

A Freedom of Information request in July 2024 found that, over the last decade, UCL has had at least forty-three research grant funded partnerships with seven different Israeli universities; seventeen of these partnerships are still running at the present time. This includes fourteen research funded partnerships with Tel Aviv University, thirteen with the Weizmann Institute of Science, nine with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and eight with Technion – Israel Institute of Technology (many grants include more than one Israeli university partner). Grant funded partnerships are time limited, and usually last between three to five years each. The evidence of the last decade, though, shows that UCL’s institutional relationships with these Israeli universities are enduring as these pass from one grant funded project to the next.¹

Most of these research grants do not, in and of themselves, have any direct or obvious link to Israeli military interests or occupation and apartheid operations in Palestine. But by holding these research grants, UCL becomes a direct institutional partner of Israeli universities that, as Maya Wind has convincingly demonstrated, have long played and continue to play a central role in supporting Israeli occupation, apartheid, war crimes and genocide as “major, willing and persistent accomplices,” engaged in practices such as “developing weapon systems and military doctrines deployed in Israel’s recent war crimes in Lebanon and Gaza, justifying the ongoing colonization of Palestinian land, [and] rationalizing gradual ethnic cleansing of indigenous Palestinians.”² Israeli universities “constitute central pillars of Israeli settler colonialism” and “actively sustain Israeli ... military occupation and apartheid.”³

UCL’s research partnerships with Israeli universities are usually funded by EU and UK research granting agencies, foundations and charitable trusts. However, two sources of research funding are important to highlight, as these are intended to support deliberate political projects to undermine Palestine solidarity speech and action and embed close research ties between the UK and Israel more generally.

UCL & the 2030 Roadmap for UK-Israel Bilateral Relations

UCL is currently a partner with Tel Aviv University in a Universities UK sponsored researcher mobility scheme that supports UK-based researchers to travel to Israel and work jointly with Israeli partners.⁴ This scheme is funded through a *Memorandum of Understanding* that was signed by the UK and Israeli governments in September 2023, which in turn follows on from the *2030 Roadmap for UK-Israel Bilateral*

¹ UCL, *Freedom of Information Request FOI 024-410 Response*, July 5, 2024.

² <https://bdsmovement.net/academic-boycott/>

³ Maya Wind (2023) *Towers of Ivory and Steel: How Israeli Universities Deny Palestinian Freedom*, pages 31, 37. London: Verso.

⁴ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/topics/international/international-research-collaboration/uk-israel-innovation-researcher-mobility>

Relations signed by the UK and Israel in March 2023.⁵ The underlying aims of the *2030 Roadmap* include working to block all Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaigns against Israel, opposing the use of the word “apartheid” in relation to Israel, tackling the “singling out” of Israel by the Human Rights Council, UN and other international bodies, and encouraging the adoption of the IHRA definition of antisemitism, in which criticism of Israel may be considered antisemitic.⁶ While UCL’s researcher mobility partnership with Tel Aviv University is grant funded and time limited, the *2030 Roadmap* seeks to establish long-term continuing research partnerships between UK and Israeli higher education institutions, academics and students.

UCL & BIRAX (Britain Israel Research and Academic Exchange Partnership)

UCL’s Institute of Immunity and Transplantation receives funding from the British Israel Research and Academic Exchange Partnership (BIRAX).⁷ BIRAX was established in 2008 with the explicit purpose of undermining calls from Palestinian civil society for an academic boycott of Israel.⁸ BIRAX receives support from the Israeli Ministry of Innovation, Science and Technology; and from Nathan Kirsch, the biggest shareholder in Magal Security Systems, a company which won 80% of the first tranches of contracts for Israel’s separation Wall in the West Bank.⁹

BIRAX also funds the UCL Division of Biosciences as a project partner with Tel Aviv University on Failures in Neuronal Homeostasis in Alzheimer’s Disease and Ageing (the grant runs through 2024).¹⁰ Tel Aviv University, as PACBI (Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel) points out: “runs joint centers with the Israeli military and Israel’s arms industries. Tel Aviv University also hosts the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), which boasts of having developed the so-called Dahiya Doctrine, or doctrine of disproportionate force. Adopted by the Israeli military, the Dahiya Doctrine calls for ‘the destruction of the national infrastructure, and intense suffering among the [civilian] population.’ ... Tel Aviv instituted a hasbara (propaganda) course on Israel’s #GazaGenocide and crowdfunded for ‘care’ packages for soldiers committing genocide in Gaza.”¹¹

UCL Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies & Hebrew University of Jerusalem

In addition to these research partnerships, UCL also has an ongoing study abroad institutional partnership with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, that was recently renewed for a five year term from 2023 to 2028.¹² The third year of UCL’s Hebrew and Jewish Studies with Year Abroad BA programme is spent at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, an Israeli university partially built on stolen Palestinian land in occupied East Jerusalem.¹³ As the Palestine Solidarity Campaign notes, “in 1968 Hebrew University of Jerusalem illegally acquired a significant portion of the land on which its Mount Scopus campus and dormitories are built. This land is part of East Jerusalem, which is under illegal occupation according to international law. Hebrew University also hosts the Israeli military’s Havatzalot program, effectively a military base on campus that includes combat training.”¹⁴

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-agreement-with-israel-takes-uk-global-science-mission-to-new-heights#:~:text=The%20funding%20being%20announced%20today,partners%2C%20at%20top%20Israeli%20institutions>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2030-roadmap-for-uk-israel-bilateral-relations/2030-roadmap-for-uk-israel-bilateral-relations#education-and-higher-education>

⁷ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/immunity-transplantation/about/funding-partnerships>

⁸ <https://bricup.org.uk/article/boycott-birax-appeal-to-uk-scientists-not-to-apply-for-tainted-funding-2/>

⁹ https://www.britishcouncil.org.il/sites/default/files/birax_brochure_2023_version_2.pdf;

<https://electronicintifada.net/content/billionaire-donor-using-british-council-combat-israel-boycott/15991>.

¹⁰ <https://www.britishcouncil.org.il/en/birax/projects/ageing/Failures-of-neuronal-homeostasis>

¹¹ <https://bdsmovement.net/news/israeli-universities-attacking-campus-uprising-uphold-israels-crimes-against-palestinians>

¹² UCL, *Freedom of Information Request FOI 024-410 Response*, July 5, 2024.

¹³ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/undergraduate/degrees/hebrew-and-jewish-studies-year-abroad-ba-2024>

¹⁴ <https://palestinecampaign.org/psc-company/hebrew-university-of-jerusalem/>.

Other Examples of UCL Research Grant Partnerships with Israeli Universities

UCL London Centre for Nanotechnology & Bar-Ilan University

UCL's London Centre for Nanotechnology is a project partner with Bar-Ilan University on a £7 million EPSRC grant in the field of condensed matter physics (the grants runs to December 31, 2024).¹⁵ Bar-Ilan University, as PACBI points out, "works closely with the Shin Bet, Israel's notorious security services, which has been condemned by the UN Committee Against Torture for its use of torture and other illegal violent interrogation tactics. Bar Ilan's Engineering faculty has run 'hackathons' in collaboration with the Israeli military and with Elbit Systems, Israel's largest arms producer. Bar Ilan University established the 'College of Judea and Samaria,' now the independent Ariel University in the illegal Israeli settlement of Ariel in the occupied Palestinian territory in violation of international law. Settlements are considered a war crime in international law."¹⁶

UCL Bartlett School of Sustainable Construction & Technion

The Bartlett School of Sustainable Construction was a project partner with Technion – Israel Institute of Technology on a €3.8 million Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions grant in Cloud-Based Building Information Modelling (the grant ran to June 30, 2024).¹⁷ Technion, as PACBI points out, "has multiple partnerships with and scholarships sponsored by Israel's top weapons manufacturers, including Elbit Systems and Rafael. Technion has developed a course on marketing the Israeli weapons industry to the international market for export. Technion also has numerous joint academic programmes with the Israeli military and developed the remote control capabilities for the Caterpillar D9 armoured bulldozer used by the Israeli military to demolish Palestinian homes—considered collective punishment under international law."¹⁸

UCL Department of Electronic and Electrical Engineering & Weizmann Institute

Weizmann UK provides Making Connections Grants. UCL has received at least twelve of these grants, the latest in 2020-2021.¹⁹ The Weizmann UK Making Connections programme was set up in 2008, with the explicit purpose of undermining calls from Palestinian civil society for an academic boycott of Israel.²⁰

¹⁵ <https://gow.epsrc.ukri.org/NGBOViewGrant.aspx?GrantRef=EP/R029075/1>.

¹⁶ <https://bdsmovement.net/news/israeli-universities-attacking-campus-uprising-uphold-israels-crimes-against-palestinians>

¹⁷ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/construction/research/virtual-research-centres/institute-digital-innovation-built-environment/research>.

¹⁸ <https://bdsmovement.net/news/israeli-universities-attacking-campus-uprising-uphold-israels-crimes-against-palestinians>

¹⁹ <https://weizmann.org.uk/assets/site/documents/Making-Connections-Project-Summaries-Full-list-2023.pdf>

²⁰ <https://www.weizmann.org.uk/collaboration/introduction#making-connections>.