

# BDS MOVEMENT | UCL

## UCL Philanthropic Partners & Complicity in Israeli Apartheid, Occupation & Genocide

UCL sees its philanthropic partners as “an integral part of the UCL ecosystem,” that support “every UCL faculty.” ([UCL, n.d.](#)). In 2016, UCL launched *It’s All Academic: Campaign for UCL*, its “biggest ever philanthropy and engagement campaign” that sought “to drive long-term sustainable philanthropic growth” ([Case, 2021](#)). The five-year campaign raised £624 million ([UCL, 2020](#)). UCL has established a “UCL Circle of Benefactors” of those who have donated at least £1 million, and in 2019 installed a Donor Wall in Wilkins Terrace to recognise these benefactors ([UCL, 2019](#)). The below philanthropic bodies, while supporting important research and work at UCL, are also complicit in Israeli apartheid, occupation and genocide. Further, there have already been instances of such organisations pulling funding or support from grantees based on criticism of Israel or solidarity with Palestine.

### The Wolfson Foundation, the Wolfson Family Charitable Trust and the Charles Wolfson Charitable Trust

A “long-term philanthropic partner” of UCL, the Wolfson Foundation has donated to UCL “every decade and more or less every year” since the 1950s ([UCL, 2021](#)). At the time of writing (31 August 2024), funds received from the Wolfson Foundation total at least £10,818,435 ([360 Giving, n.d.](#)). Departments who have benefitted in recent decades have included the Leonard Wolfson Experimental Neurology Centre, the UK Dementia Research Institute, Oriel (a centre for advancing eye health), the Cancer Institute and the Grant Museum of Zoology ([UCL, n.d.](#); [UKDRI, n.d.](#); [UCL, 2023](#); [Wolfson Foundation, 2015](#)). Some of this funding, such as the £10 million towards the renovation of the Cruciform Building, which houses the Wolfson Institute for Biomedical Research, was given in collaboration with the Wolfson Family Charitable Trust ([UCL, n.d.](#)). The Wolfson Foundation also funds a number of scholarships for postgraduate researchers, including tuition fees and maintenance stipends ([Wolfson, n.d.](#)). The Charles Wolfson Centre for Reconstructive Surgery, “a joint project between the Royal Free Hospital and UCL” has received £1,250,000 from the Charles Wolfson Charitable Trust ([Royal Free Charity, n.d.](#); [NHS, 2016](#)). All three of these organisations have direct connections to Israeli occupation. Although its website focuses on the UK, the Wolfson Foundation also grants awards to universities and hospitals in Israel. For example, its annual accounts for the year ending 31 March 2023 show awards for research equipment made to Israeli medical centres totalling £1,500,000 ([Charity Commission, 2024](#)).

The Wolfson Family Charitable Trust, set up in 1958, is a sister trust to the Wolfson Foundation, “with the same administration and similar aims, but its own constituted board of trustees” ([WFCT, n.d.](#)). The Wolfson Family Charitable Trust has a much more explicit focus on projects in Israel and has directly invested in Israel over many years. Its website describes its investments as follows:

“A large majority of the assets of the WFCT derive from the realisation of the Trust’s historic investments in Israel, so the majority of the funds are allocated for grants in Israel. The Trust’s funding in Israel is largely proactive, in that we identify and work with key partner organisations (and our Advisory Committee Israel) in areas of mutual interest.” ([WFCT, n.d.](#))

More specifically, “A large proportion of the [Trust’s] assets derive from the realisation of the Trust’s involvement in the Paz Oil Company of Israel”, company which is active in illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank ([Charity Commission, 2021](#); [Who Profits, n.d.](#)).

A video posted on the Wolfson Family Charitable Trust website describes both the Trust and the Wolfson Foundation as “dedicated to the promotion of science, technology and medicine in Israel” ([WFCT, 2018](#)). It also says that “the Wolfson Family Charitable Trust and the Wolfson Foundation support most major hospitals in Israel.” The same video describes the family’s aims: “Today, the third generation of the Wolfson family continues its long-lasting legacy and mission, maintaining Israel at the forefront of science, healthcare, education and the arts.” Both the Wolfson Foundation and the Wolfson Family Charitable Trust have supported the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Technion, Weizmann Institute of Science, Tel-Aviv University, Ben-Gurion University and Bar-Ilan University ([Powerbase, n.d.](#)). The Wolfson Foundation financially supports the Jerusalem Foundation, which has supported illegal occupation and ethnic cleansing in East Jerusalem ([Jerusalem Foundation, 2022](#); [Powerbase, n.d.](#)).

The Charles Wolfson Charitable Trust, created in 1960, is run by one branch of the Wolfson family and seems to be separate from the Wolfson Foundation and the Wolfson Family Charitable Trust. It has funded pro-Israel groups such as the Israel-Diaspora Trust and the Anglo-Israel Association. It has also funded right-wing think-tanks such as Civitas, the Social Affairs Unit, the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Adam Smith Research Trust ([Powerbase, n.d.](#)). Its chair, Andrew Wolfson, is also the chair of Beit Halochem, a UK charity supporting the occupation forces, which raises money “to support the rehabilitation of Israel’s wounded veterans and to improve their quality of life” ([Charity Commission, n.d.](#); [Charity Commission, n.d.](#); [BHUK, n.d.](#)):

## **The Pears Family Charitable Foundation**

Pears is a long-time philanthropic supporter of UCL and has been described by Provost Michael Spence as “the best kind of philanthropic partner you can have” ([UCL, 2023](#)). At the time of writing (31 August 2024), Pears has granted at least £4,333,510 to UCL in total ([360 Giving, n.d.](#)). Its involvement in UCL includes the establishment of the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education in 2008; funding for the construction of the Pears Building in 2021, the home of UCL’s Institute of Immunity and Transplantation; funding the Centre for Research in Autism and Education at the UCL Institute of Education; and an £80,000 donation to the UCLH Charity ([UCL, n.d.](#); [UCL, n.d.](#); [UCL, n.d.](#); [Charity Commission, 2020](#)). In June 2018, Pears granted £22,000 to the UCL Israel Alumni Association ([360 Giving, n.d.](#)).

The Pears Foundation helped to establish BIRAX (the Britain-Israel Research and Academic Exchange Partnership) and the UK-Israel Life Sciences Council, as direct counter-measures to the Palestine BDS movement ([Electronic Intifada, 2016](#)). Trevor Pears, the Executive Chair of the

Pears Foundation, has been directly involved with the Conservative Friends of Israel and the BICOM (Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre), an Israel lobby group in the UK ([Powerbase, n.d.](#)).

The foundation has demonstrated how charitable foundations can put pressure on grantees. In 2021, Pears withdrew its name from the Institute for the Study of Antisemitism at Birkbeck after Institute Director David Feldman publicly criticised the use of the IHRA definition of antisemitism ([Jewish News, 2021](#)).

## **Sigrid Rausing Trust**

In 2019, the Rausing Trust awarded UCL a £5 million grant to support the development of a Neurogenetic Therapies Programme at the Queen Square Institute of Neurology and the UK Dementia Research Institute ([Sigrid Rausing Trust, n.d.](#)).

In 2023-2024, the Rausing Trust cancelled grants and withdrew invitations to apply for further funding from several organizations after it accused them of “legitimising or even celebrating Hamas’ violent attacks against civilians, or [...] using de-legitimising and/or inaccurate language about Israel” ([Sigrid Rausing Trust, 2023](#)). One of the organisations to lose their grant funding was FRIDA, a Canadian feminist group that issued a call in October 2023 to “act with transformational feminist solidarity with Palestine” ([FRIDA, 2023](#)).