

BDS MOVEMENT | UCL

UCL Power Analysis

Which External Actors Are Shaping UCL Policy & Practice on Israel/Palestine?

UCL describes itself on its “Who We Are” webpage as “a diverse global community of world-class academics, students, **industry links, external partners, and alumni.**”¹ In this self-mapping, university staff and students constitute only a minority component of the overall UCL community.

1. UK Government & State Agencies

- The **UK Government, Office for Students, UKRI (UK Research & Innovation), and Department for Education** have all shown a strong pro-Israel stance and have put direct pressure on universities to censure Palestine solidarity speech and action.
- **In 2023, the UK and Israeli governments signed a 2030 Roadmap for UK-Israel Bilateral Relations.** The underlying aims of the *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.² The *Roadmap* seeks to encourage close partnerships between UK and Israeli universities, academics and students. As a direct result of this *Roadmap*, UCL became a partner with Tel Aviv University in 2024.³
- The UK government **funding squeeze on the UK higher education sector** has increased pressure on UCL to turn to industry partners, philanthropic foundations and university alumni for additional sources of funding; many of these bring with them strong pro-Israel stances.

2. UCL Philanthropic Partners: Foundations & Charitable Trusts

UCL sees its philanthropic partners as “an integral part of the UCL ecosystem,” it states that “every UCL faculty has benefited from philanthropy,” and it seeks to “deepen relationships with donors.”⁴ **In 2016, UCL launched *Its All Academic: Campaign for UCL*, its “biggest ever philanthropy and engagement campaign” that sought**

¹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/about/who>.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2030-roadmap-for-uk-israel-bilateral-relations/2030-roadmap-for-uk-israel-bilateral-relations#education-and-higher-education>.

³ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/topics/international/international-research-collaboration/uk-israel-innovation-researcher-mobility>; <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%20institution>

⁴ <https://advancement.ucl.ac.uk/philanthropy-impact-report-2022-23/>; <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/giving/ucl-advancement-2021-22-review>.

“to drive long-term sustainable philanthropic growth.”⁵ The five-year campaign raised £624 million. 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.⁶ Notable philanthropic partners of UCL include:

- **Wolfson Foundation & Charles Wolfson Charitable Trust:** A long-term philanthropic partner of UCL, the Wolfson Foundation has donated to UCL almost annually since the 1950s.⁷ This includes a £20million grant for the Leonard Wolfson Experimental Neurology Centre, a £2 million grant for the UK Dementia Research Institute, and most recently, a £5 million grant in 2023 for Oriel, a centre for advancing eye health. UCL is home to the Wolfson Centre for Biomedical Research and the Charles Wolfson Centre for Reconstructive Surgery. The Wolfson Foundation is a sister trust to the Wolfson Family Charitable Trust, with joint administration and shared headquarters. Both the Wolfson Foundation and the Wolfson Trust have long supported the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Technion, Weizmann Institute of Science, Tel-Aviv University, Ben-Gurion University and Bar-Ilan University.⁸ The Wolfson Foundation supports the Jerusalem Foundation, which has sponsored ethnic cleansing in East Jerusalem.⁹ The assets of the Wolfson Trust come largely from holdings in Paz Oil, which supports illegal settlements in the West Bank.¹⁰ UCL is also supported by the Charles Wolfson Charitable Trust, which funds pro-Israel groups such as the Israel-Diaspora Trust and the Anglo-Israel Association.¹¹
- **Pears 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.”¹² Pears helped establish (and continues to work in direct partnership with) the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education in 2008 and helped fund the construction of the Pears Building in 2021, the home of UCL’s Institute of Immunity and Transplantation. It also funds the Centre for Research in Autism and Education at the UCL Institute of Education. Moreover, 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.¹³ Trevor Pears, the Chairman of the Pears Foundation, has been directly involved with the Conservative Friends of Israel and BICOM (Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre), an Israel lobby group in the UK.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵
- **Sigrid Rausing Trust:** In 2019, the Rausing Trust gave UCL a £5 million grant to support the development of a Neurogenetic Therapies Programme at the Queen Square Institute of Neurology and UK Dementia Research Institute. In 2023-2024, the Rausing Trust cancelled grants and withdrew invitations

⁵ <https://www.case.org/awards/case-platinum-awards/2021/its-all-academic-campaign-uc/#:~:text=‘It’s%20All%20Academic%2C’%20UCL’s,and%20inspire%20250%2C000%20volunteer%20hours..>

⁶ [https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/vice-provost-views/tag/fundraising/.](https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/vice-provost-views/tag/fundraising/)

⁷ [https://www.ucl.ac.uk/giving/case-studies/2021/jul/wolfson-foundation-funding-better-future.](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/giving/case-studies/2021/jul/wolfson-foundation-funding-better-future)

⁸ [https://powerbase.info/index.php/Wolfson Family Charitable Trust](https://powerbase.info/index.php/Wolfson_Family_Charitable_Trust); [https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/about-the-register-of-charities?p_p_id=uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=2&p_p_state=maximized&p_p_mode=view&p_p_resource_id=%2Faccounts-resource&p_p_cacheability=cacheLevelPage&uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_objectiveId=A11485293&uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_mvcRenderCommandName=%2Faccounts-and-annual-returns&uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_organisationNumber=5044355.](https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/about-the-register-of-charities?p_p_id=uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet&p_p_lifecycle=2&p_p_state=maximized&p_p_mode=view&p_p_resource_id=%2Faccounts-resource&p_p_cacheability=cacheLevelPage&uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_objectiveId=A11485293&uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_mvcRenderCommandName=%2Faccounts-and-annual-returns&uk_gov_ccew_onereg_charitydetails_web_portlet_CharityDetailsPortlet_priv_r_p_organisationNumber=5044355)

⁹ <https://jerusalemfoundation.org/donor/wolfson-foundation/>; [https://powerbase.info/index.php/Jerusalem Foundation.](https://powerbase.info/index.php/Jerusalem_Foundation)

¹⁰ [https://investigate.afsc.org/company/paz-oil.](https://investigate.afsc.org/company/paz-oil)

¹¹ [https://powerbase.info/index.php/The Charles Wolfson Charitable Trust.](https://powerbase.info/index.php/The_Charles_Wolfson_Charitable_Trust)

¹² [https://advancement.ucl.ac.uk/philanthropy-impact-report-2022-23/.](https://advancement.ucl.ac.uk/philanthropy-impact-report-2022-23/)

¹³ [https://bricup.org.uk/article/boycott-birax-appeal-to-uk-scientists-not-to-apply-for-tainted-funding-2/.](https://bricup.org.uk/article/boycott-birax-appeal-to-uk-scientists-not-to-apply-for-tainted-funding-2/)

¹⁴ [https://powerbase.info/index.php/Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre.](https://powerbase.info/index.php/Britain_Israel_Communications_and_Research_Centre)

¹⁵ [https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/pears-foundation-removes-name-from-antisemitism-institute/.](https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/pears-foundation-removes-name-from-antisemitism-institute/)

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.”¹⁶ 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.”¹⁷

- Other UCL philanthropic partners with strong pro-Israel stances and/or financial ties to Israel include the **Edmond J Safra Foundation**, the **Rosetrees Trust**, and **Baillie Gifford**.¹⁸

3. UCL Alumni Groups & Networks

- **The UCL Advancement Team focuses on building and maintaining strong lifelong relationships with a network of alumni donors**, particularly those who have entered UCL’s Circle of Benefactors by donating £1 million or more. While some unofficial alumni groups, such as UCL Alumni for Palestine, have mobilised in support of Palestinian solidarity speech and action on campus, many other UCL alumni hold strong pro-Israel stances.
- For example, one alumnus who is part of UCL’s Circle of Benefactors is **Stephen Rubin** of the **Pentland Group**, who funds the Pentland-Churchill Scholarships at UCL. Rubin is also Vice President of the Council of Christians and Jews, the Forum for Discussion of Israel & Palestine, and the United Jewish Israel Appeal, and has donated to the Board of Deputies of British Jews, all of which are identified by Powerbase and elsewhere as pro-Israel, Zionist organizations.
- UCL has an **Israel Alumni Association** (but no official Palestine Alumni Association).¹⁹ In September 2023, UCL awarded Honorary Fellowships to UCL alumni Jennifer Janes and Zvi Geffen for establishing the Israel Alumni Association in 1996, and the British-Chevening-UCL Israel Alumni-Chaim Herzog Award.²⁰ For twenty-two years, the Chair of the Israel Alumni Association, who also represented UCL for the annual Leonard Sainer Foundation Scholarship, was **UCL alumnus Gabriel Bach, who was also an Israeli Supreme Court judge and sat on the Israel Council on Foreign Relations**.²¹ The UCL Israel Alumni Association has expressed strong opposition to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.²²
- In November 2023, the **Pinsker Centre organised a letter sent by over 500 UCL alumni to Provost Michael Spence demanding he crack down on student groups and the UCL UCU staff union for their Palestine solidarity speech and action**. The Pinsker Centre was itself set up by UCL alumni in 2016 with the explicit purpose of promoting a strong pro-Israel stance on UK university campuses.²³
- In June 2024, **UK Lawyers for Israel (UKLFI)** wrote a letter to Provost Michael Spence condemning the hundreds of UCL staff who have signed a Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions pledge.²⁴ Once again there was a strong UCL alumni connection: **several of the UKLFI patrons, including Baroness Deech, Lord Pannick and Lord Dyson, are former presidents of the Bentham Association, which is the UCL Laws Alumni Association**.

¹⁶ <https://www.sigrid-rausing-trust.org/story/statement-srt-cancels-grants/>.

¹⁷ <https://youngfeministfund.org/we-must-act-with-transformational-feminist-solidarity-with-palestine/>.

¹⁸ [https://www.gov.uk/government/news/28-million-awarded-to-fund-projects-by-british-and-israeli-scientists](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/28-million-awarded-to-fund-projects-by-british-and-israeli-scientists;); <https://www.edmondsafra.org/about-the-foundation/>; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce99lg5r247o>.

¹⁹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/alumni/clubs-and-networks/global-alumni-groups>.

²⁰ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/graduation/sites/graduation/files/ucl-graduation-programme-september-2023.pdf>.

²¹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/laws/news/2022/mar/tribute-justice-gabriel-bach>.

²² <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2007/nov/10th-anniversary-israel-alumni-group>.

²³ <https://mondoweiss.net/2023/12/the-zionist-lobbys-threat-to-academic-freedom-in-uk-universities/>.

²⁴ <https://www.uklfi.com/ucl-warned-of-liability-for-equality-breaches-from-staff-committing-to-bds>.

4. UCL Industry Partnerships

UCL has hundreds of industry partners, and dozens of webpages set up to actively solicit new corporate partnerships. Industry partnerships are arranged at university level by UCL Research, Innovation and Global Engagement, at faculty, department and programme level, and by individual members of staff. Industry partners are involved in research partnerships, student mentorships and internships, Industrial Advisory Boards and commercialization start-up ventures. Notable industry partners of UCL include:

- **Google DeepMind:** A subsidiary of Alphabet Inc, Google DeepMind has a “long-standing relationship” with UCL, funding Master’s and PhD scholarships, as well as a DeepMind Chair in Machine Learning & Artificial Intelligence at the UCL Centre for Artificial Intelligence.²⁵ Google DeepMind staff also directly run a course and lecture series in the UCL Department of Computer Science, and have collaborated on joint research with UCL staff. The DeepMind Partnership was established as part of UCL’s Campaign for UCL in 2016-2020. When DeepMind was acquired by Google in 2014, it made “an agreement that said its technology would never be used for military or surveillance purposes.” But “a series of governance changes ended with DeepMind being bound by the same AI principles that apply to Google at large,” which involve “signing lucrative contracts with the Pentagon and Israel.”²⁶
- **Cisco:** In 2018, Cisco announced that it would be partnering with UCL to open a new UCL AI Centre. In 2021, UCL became the first UK university to be a Cisco AI Global Centre of Excellence; this was part of a long-term relationship between UCL and Cisco that goes back for many years.²⁷ Cisco are also a partner of UCL’s UKRI Centre for Doctoral Training in Foundational AI. UCL describes the partnership as “a fantastic example of a strategic alliance between UCL and a global technology company with a shared ambition to help shape the future of AI in the UK and around the world.”²⁸ Cisco has been reported by the Who Profits Research Centre and AFSC Investigate as having extensive links with supporting Israeli military, occupation and settlement in Palestine.
- **BAE Systems:** BAE Systems benefits from a deep ongoing research relationship with UCL engineering departments and centres. BAE is listed on the Mechanical Engineering Department’s webpage as a funder. BAE offers internships, funds bursaries and collaborates on MSc programmes, some of which feature current and ex-BAE employees as academic staff. BAE Systems are heavily involved in the current decimation of Gaza, with UK facilities producing the M109 howitzer, a 155mm mobile artillery system which fires “tens of thousands of shells into the Gaza strip.”²⁹ BAE Systems profits directly from the current conflict in Gaza. The company enjoyed record operating profits of £2.6bn in 2023 and a surge in share price, seeing a 24% increase in 6 months as of April 2024 fuelled by the Gaza conflict.³⁰

5. UCL Enterprises

- **As UCL has increasingly moved into the business of incubating spin-out start-up companies from university research, it has entered a comprehensive and close set of direct partnerships with Barclays.** UCL Business, the university’s “technology transfer company,” lists Barclays as a partner that helps “to translate UCL AI innovation into new companies and licensing opportunities with global

²⁵ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2019/nov/deepmind-renews-its-commitment-ucl>.

²⁶ <https://time.com/6964364/exclusive-no-tech-for-apartheid-google-workers-protest-project-nimbus-1-2-billion-contract-with-israel/>.

²⁷ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2021/sep/ucl-and-cisco-join-forces-help-uk-lead-way-ai>.

²⁸ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2021/sep/ucl-and-cisco-join-forces-help-uk-lead-way-ai>.

²⁹ <https://afsc.org/gaza-genocide-companies>.

³⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/feb/21/bae-systems-profit-ukraine-israel-gaza-wars-ftse-100>.

impact.”³¹ In many of these partnerships with UCL, Barclays staff are working on-site alongside UCL academics and students to provide business mentorship.

- **These partnerships with Barclays include:** a law-tech incubator set up by Barclays Eagle Labs and the UCL Faculty of Laws and Faculty of Engineering; a health-care industry start-up incubator set up by Barclays and the UCL School of Life and Medical Sciences and Faculty of Engineering; the East London Inclusive Enterprise Zone (ELIEZ) set up by Barclays Eagle Labs and UCL East, as “the first fully accessible, specially designed space for entrepreneurs and business leaders who are disabled, or are focused on servicing disabled people;” and the London Social Venture Fund set up by Barclays Eagle Labs and UCL to provide “early funding for new London startups pursuing a social goal.”³²
- **Barclays has over £2 billion in shares of ten companies that have been identified as providing arms and components to Israel** for use in their siege of Gaza and over £6.1 billion in loans and underwriting to seven. These are BAE Systems, Boeing, Caterpillar, Elbit Systems, General Dynamics, QinetiQ, Rolls-Royce, Leonardo, Lockheed Martin and Raytheon.³³

6. UCL Investments

Detailed scrutiny of [UCL's investment portfolio](#) reveals that **in the 2022-23 period UCL held investments amounting to £15 million in companies actively highlighted by various organisations for their involvement in or support of Israeli policies and practices which facilitate war crimes and uphold the Israeli occupation and apartheid** in violation of the human rights of Palestinians. This accounted for approximately 7% of the total UCL investment portfolio, and includes companies such as:

- **ING Group** - Listed as one of the [top 10 European creditors](#) lending to companies involved in illegal settlement of occupied Palestinian land [in violation of international law](#).
- **Alphabet** (the parent company of Google) & **Amazon** - A major joint contract, [Project Nimbus](#), provides cloud computing and surveillance technology to the Israeli government and military, facilitating unlawful surveillance of Palestinians and expansion of illegal Israeli settlements.
- **NICE Systems** - US subsidiary of NICE Ltd, an [Israeli surveillance company](#) founded by former members of IDF unit 8200. NICE Systems market their surveillance tech to the US prison system.
- **CISCO** - Long-term relationship providing various [digital services for the Israeli government and Israeli military](#) which facilitate the occupation.
- **Siemens** - [German multinational conglomerate](#) with equipment installed in illegal settlement roads and the [A1 train line into the occupied West Bank](#). Siemens have also won a contract to construct the [EuroAsia Interconnector sub-sea pipeline](#), a project to link Israel and European electricity grid, benefitting illegal settlements and exploiting occupied Palestinian land and sea territories.

7. UCL Council – UCL's Governing Body

- UCL Council is comprised of 20 members, with a majority (11) of appointed members from outside of UCL. **Most of these come from the world of corporate finance and law**, and include directors and board members with **Airbus, McKinsey & Company, JPMorgan, and the Compass Group** (the largest

³¹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/artificial-intelligence/our-partners>.

³² <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/laws/news/2018/apr/ucl-partners-barclays-eagle-labs-new-law-tech-initiative-help-transform-legal-industry>; <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/engineering/case-studies/2021/nov/ucl-and-partners-launch-uks-first-precision-medicine-accelerator>; <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/enterprise/news/2019/sep/uks-first-dedicated-space-disabled-entrepreneurs-open-queen-elizabeth-olympic-park>; <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2023/oct/ucl-among-london-universities-supporting-social-venture-startups>.

³³ <https://palestinecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/Barclays-report-May-2024-v3-FINAL.pdf>.

foodservice company in Europe). External Council members also sit on and chair the UCL Finance Committee, Audit Committee and Investments Committee.³⁴

- **The Chair of UCL Council, Victor Chu, is a Member of the Board of Directors of Airbus SE.** Airbus is one of the largest arms companies in the world and has collaborated extensively with Israeli Aerospace Industries.³⁵
- **Another appointed member of UCL Council, Tania Zulu Holt, is a Senior Partner with McKinsey & Company.** McKinsey has offices in Israel and claims to work “across all major sectors of Israel’s economy.”³⁶ This has included a direct consulting contract with the Israel Defense Forces.³⁷
- **A third appointed member of UCL Council, Sarah Whitney, is a Director with JPMorgan Global Growth & Income.** JP Morgan runs the JP Morgan Israel Tech Center in Israel, which it committed to expanding in January 2024; the company has also issued statement strongly in support of Israel.³⁸ In November 2023, senior financial managers working with JP Morgan in the United States co-signed a letter pledging not to hire pro-Palestinian demonstrators.³⁹ JP Morgan also holds shares in Elbit Systems, an Israeli arms company that is a key supplier to the Israeli military.⁴⁰

³⁴ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/governance-compliance/council/council-membership>.

³⁵ <https://palestinecampaign.org/psc-company/airbus/>.

³⁶ <https://www.mckinsey.com/il/our-work>.

³⁷ <https://www.jpost.com/israel/idf-looks-to-mckinsey-to-cut-spending>;
<https://mapliberation.org/plain/entities/McKinsey.html>.

³⁸ <https://www.calcalistech.com/ctechnews/article/hk4lupsfa>.

³⁹ <https://www.ynetnews.com/business/article/b1jkxtqe6>.

⁴⁰ <https://fintel.io/so/us/eslt/jpmorgan-chase->.