

# UNESCO Chairs & UNITWIN Networks

2025

Handbook for  
UK applicants



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United Kingdom  
National Commission  
for UNESCO



Front Image: The Noyam African Dance Institute working with the UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts at the University of Glasgow, Professor Alison Phipps.

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# Timeline for 2023 cycle

## Stage One: Expression of Interest

10 January 2025	Opening of UNESCO Chair and UNITWIN Network Programme application process
20 and 23 January 2025	Proposed informal information webinars
Friday 31 January 2025	Deadline for Expression of Interest to be sent to the UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC)

## Stage Two: Application

Monday, 3 March 2025	Deadline for Applications to be sent to the UK National Commission for UNESCO (17:00)
4 March to 4 April 2025	Peer review of Applications (5 weeks)
7 April to 11 April 2025	Applicants provided with anonymised feedback. Applicants can respond to correct factual information.
14 April 2025	UKNC Peer Review Panel to consider applications and reviews
15 April 2025	Candidates informed of outcome
16 April to 25 April 2025	Successful candidates to update application as appropriate from feedback provided

## Stage Three: Submission to UNESCO

By Wednesday 30 April 2025	Full Applications with letter of endorsement from UKNC submitted to UNESCO via online platform
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# UNESCO Chairs & UNITWIN Networks

UNESCO Chairs & UNITWIN Networks are a global network of universities that carry out research in areas of UNESCO's work



UNESCO Chair in Archaeological Ethics and Practice in Cultural Heritage, Professor Robin Coningham, on the ruins of Kasthamandap. Photo: Durham University

# The UNESCO Programme

## At a glance

UNESCO Chair status and UNITWIN Network membership:

- Increase the profile and reach of their research
- Broker new partnerships
- Encourage members to engage in leadership activities

The UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme advances research, training and programme development in higher education by building university networks and encouraging inter-university cooperation.

UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Network projects undertake training, research, information sharing and outreach activities in UNESCO's major programme areas (education, natural sciences, social and human sciences, culture, and communication and information). UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks provide an innovative modality for international academic cooperation and capacity building (particularly North-South and South-South), acting as think tanks and as bridge builders between the academic world, civil society, local communities, research and policy-making.

The majority of UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Network projects are interdisciplinary and intersectoral. They involve all UNESCO programme sectors, with active cooperation with UNESCO's Field Offices, Centres and Institutes.

**UNESCO Chairs:** Awarded to individual higher education institutions to initiate programmes that further research and training in one of UNESCO's fields of competence. Chairs involve academics, scholars and graduate students, as well as key partners such as NGOs, foundations and public and private sector organisations. The UNESCO Chairholder has to hold the title of Professor or be of Professor-level.

**UNITWIN Networks:** Through the University Twinning and Network Scheme (UNITWIN), UNESCO matches colleges, universities and research institutions in industrialised countries with counterparts in developing countries to share information and knowledge in areas of need in the development context. Scholars who participate are often linked through web sites and portals, in addition to loaned faculty positions, training and conferences.



# Our Process

## Our role

The role of the UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC), as directed by UNESCO, is to carefully consider and evaluate proposals for the establishment of new UNESCO Chairs in the UK and to select a small number of high quality proposals each year to put forward to UNESCO, with its endorsement, for consideration. In addition, the UKNC also considers and evaluates proposals for the establishment of new UNITWIN Networks led by UK institutions and selects high quality proposals that it will give its endorsement for UNESCO's consideration. Currently, only two proposals can be put forward to UNESCO per annual cycle.

## 1 Stage One - Contact us

UK institutions looking to establish a UNESCO Chair or lead a UNITWIN Network in the UK must submit an expression of interest to the UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC) by **31 January 2025**. Please make contact with the UKNC at the earliest possible opportunity using the form provided on our website. You will be asked to provide the UKNC with information about the proposed Chair/UNITWIN Network, the name of the lead academic (**please note, the lead academic must be a Professor**), an outline of the relevant area of research, alongside a working title of the proposed Chair/UNITWIN Network.

This early contact will allow the UKNC to have appropriate reviewers with relevant expertise in place to ensure the application advice is of the highest quality. More information on the independent and rigorous UKNC accreditation process can be found on the UKNC website.

UNITWIN Network proposals should also be prepared in consultation with UNESCO staff responsible for the area of focus. More information is available at <https://en.unesco.org/unitwin-unesco-chairs-programme>

**Expressions of interest MUST be received by the UKNC by 31 January 2025. Expressions of interest received after this date will be considered for the 2025 UNESCO Chairs & UNITWIN Network cycle.**

## 2 Stage Two - Submission of Applications to the UKNC

Applicants are invited to submit a full application to the UKNC for its consideration by **3 March 2025**. Institutions should prepare this application according to the full proposal proforma included at the end of UNESCO's Guidelines and procedures for the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380998>.

Applications will be evaluated by the UKNC through a peer review process. **Only two will be selected for endorsement and submission to UNESCO. Not all applications will be successful.**

## 3 Stage Three - Submission to UNESCO Secretariat for Review

The UKNC will identify a small number of high-calibre proposals to put forward to UNESCO each year. Successful proposals will be sent to UNESCO, with the UKNC's endorsement, for UNESCO's consideration by its 30 April 2025 deadline.

Endorsement by the UKNC and submission to UNESCO completes the UK-level review process. However, this is not a guarantee that an application will be successful. UNESCO will conduct its own review process. Currently, UNESCO are only accepting two proposals per annual cycle.

### + Important notes on the process

Prior to preparing and submitting the application to the UKNC, interested institutions must carefully review UNESCO's major priorities in education, natural sciences, social and human sciences, culture, and communication and information, referring to the current [UNESCO Medium Term Strategy](#).

Any agreement for the establishment of a UNESCO Chair or UNITWIN Network is between UNESCO and the host institution. Strong institutional commitment is therefore paramount. Applicants must have informed senior management within their institution of their intention. The application will need to be submitted to the UKNC under the signature of the institution's Vice Chancellor or Principal, together with a detailed letter of support from them.

UNESCO Chair and UNITWIN Network proposals must be submitted to the UKNC by the aforementioned UK deadlines. Proposals cannot be considered outside of these deadlines due to the high interest in the Programme from UK institutions. The submission of an application to the UKNC does not constitute the agreement of the UKNC to submit the proposal to UNESCO. Applications submitted directly to UNESCO will be returned to the UKNC and will not be processed.

It should be noted that UNESCO will pay particular attention to proposals from: underrepresented countries/regions that have no UNESCO Chair or a UNITWIN Network; from Africa; from small island developing countries (SIDS); those where activities undertaken are multi-country, inter-regional or international in scope in particular those focused on and/or benefitting Africa; those which are interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary in design; those which involve future-orientated research in the various UNESCO sectors; thematic areas not already covered by another UNESCO Chair in the country; those which put forward a woman chairperson; those with a gender-sensitive approach. Please see the updated [Criteria for the establishment of UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks](#)





UNESCO Chair in Geoscience and Society at the University of Plymouth,  
Professor Iain Stewart.



# Criteria for 2025

## At a glance

We would particularly welcome for applications in 2024 which:

- Are proposed by a woman chairperson
- Have expertise in Girls Education
- Support north-south and north-south-south partnerships

The role of the UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC), as directed by UNESCO, is to consider and evaluate proposals for the establishment of new UNESCO Chairs in the UK and to select a small number of high quality proposals each year to put forward to UNESCO for consideration.

In addition, the UKNC also considers and evaluates proposals for the establishment of new UNITWIN Networks led by UK institutions and selects high quality proposals to give its endorsement for UNESCO's consideration.

Currently, UNESCO are accepting two proposals for each annual cycle.

In line with UNESCO's new strategic orientations for the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme following a review in January 2021, a strong emphasis is placed on proposals that contribute to UNESCO's priorities as outlined in the Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2029. Proposals will need to have an integrated workplan that combines research, teaching/training, and community engagement. Proposals should demonstrate established partnerships or plans to establish them with UNESCO teams, other UNESCO Chairs or UNITWIN Networks, UNESCO networks, UNESCO Category 2 Centres, as well as other partners.

We will consider proposals using the UK criteria outlined in this section. This supersedes earlier UK criteria and takes into consideration UNESCO Headquarters guidelines for the submission of proposals as outlined in UNESCO's "Guidelines and Procedures for the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme" which can be found at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380998>

In 2025, the UKNC will examine UNESCO Chair and UNITWIN Network proposals along the following criteria:

**A. In a priority programme area**

Responds to UNESCO's priority areas of competence

Corresponds to UNESCO's overall objectives and one or more of its sectoral priorities, as set out in UNESCO's Medium Term Strategy and Programme and Budget, as well as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

NOTE: In November 2021, UNESCO's 41st General Conference considered a new Medium Term Strategy (2022-2029) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which can be accessed here:

UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy 2014-2021 (37 C/4): <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378083?posInSet=4&queryId=f4082765-2f1f-4710-a706-047db14472d1-draft-data-297>

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: <https://en.unesco.org/sdgs>

An interdisciplinary approach is to be encouraged; as are proposals which involve future-orientated research in the various UNESCO sectors.

Broadens range of UNESCO Chair/UNITWIN Network activities in the UK  
High academic quality

Avoids duplication of existing UNESCO Chair/UNITWIN Network activities in the UK in order to broaden the range, reflect the breadth of UK excellence in higher education and reflect more fully UNESCO's areas of competence in education, natural sciences, social and human sciences, culture and communication & information.

To support the diversification of the programme, please note that applications from Higher Education Institutions with existing UNESCO Chairs or UNITWIN Networks will only be considered if its area of focus is different from those already established in the UK.

Demonstrates high academic quality output.

Clear objectives

Contains clearly stated objectives which demonstrate how the project is directly related to priorities for national, regional, or international development.

Appropriate approach and activities

Identifies activities and an approach which adequately meet the objectives of the project, including adequate consideration given to evaluation mechanisms and dissemination of the outputs and outcomes.

Potential to make a difference

Proposals that are educationally innovative in terms of new paradigms (future challenges) and forms of intervention (e.g. open universities) are encouraged.

Shows the potential to make a vital, unique and innovative contribution to the field within the context of its planned implementation



Evidence of sustainability

**B. Sustainable**

Access to human resources

Provides concrete evidence of the sustainability of the project, giving attention to its ability to mobilise and attract resources.

Identifies sufficient numbers of highly qualified personnel to carry out the activities of the proposed UNESCO Chair or UNITWIN Network.

In particular, a UNESCO Chair should include:

1. A Chairholder as its academic head;
2. A number of researchers from the host institution and from other domestic and international institutions who are involved with the activities of the programme; and
3. A number of students or researchers pursuing postgraduate studies and/or high-level training and research under the direction of the Chair.

The Chairholder or UNITWIN Network Coordinator should:

1. Have a strong academic reputation – be a renowned specialist in the domain(s) to be covered;
2. Have the capacity and experience to promote cooperation at national, regional and international levels; and
3. Be willing and able to mobilise resources from the private and public sectors.

Adequate institutional capacity and experience

For UK proposals, a Chairholder should already hold a professorial chair at an Higher Education Institute. This does not apply to UNITWIN Network Coordinators.

Access to financial resources

Identifies funding sources and demonstrates that funding can be secured to carry out the proposed activities. Proposals should not rely on UNESCO for funding.

Demonstrates a capacity for successfully implementing the proposed project and activities.

Ability to contribute to inter-university cooperation

**C. North-South and/or North-South-South cooperation dimension**

Designates partner institution(s) and an appropriate system for sharing knowledge, resources and information.

Preference will be given to those proposals that actively support North-South and/or North-South-South cooperation and partner/network with institutions from developing or transitioning countries.

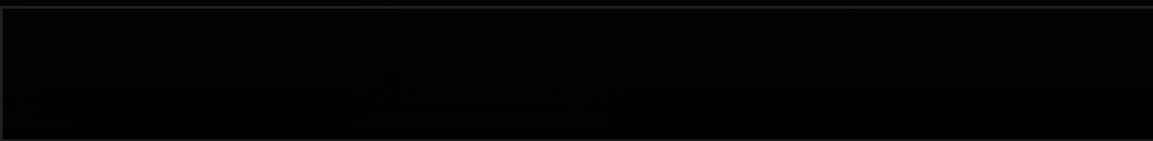
Potential for incorporation into a network or a networking of networks

D. Easily integrated into an existing network or systematically grouped into priority areas

Has potential to be incorporated into a network or cluster as UNESCO moves to systematically regroup Chairs into networks (networking Chairs), and to create dynamic networks (networking of Networks) to better promote dynamic and effective interaction.

A list of existing UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks (searchable by domain) can be found at: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/higher-education/unitwin>

# Understanding UNESCO's Guidelines





# Overview of UNESCO's Guidelines for UNESCO Chairs

Established at Higher  
Education Institutions

UNESCO Chairs can be established at universities, other institutions of higher learning and research institutions in higher education. UNESCO Chairs may also involve higher education non-governmental organisations, foundations, and public and private sector organisations. Chairs are established for an initial period of four years.

UNESCO Chair as Teaching  
and/or Research Unit

A UNESCO Chair may be established by reinforcing an existing teaching or research programme and giving it an international dimension, or one may be established as a new teaching and research unit. Such a unit should include:

(i) a Chairholder as its academic head; (ii) a team of lecturers or researchers from the host institution and from other institutions, both in the country concerned and from abroad, (particularly developing countries and those in transition), who are associated with the activities of the Chair; (iii) a number of students and researchers pursuing postgraduate studies or high-level training and research under the Chair.

Relevant and Effective

Relevance and effectiveness at national, regional and global levels are among the prime goals of the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme. UNESCO Chairs should be sustainable and must support UNESCO programme objectives and priorities, particularly as outlined in the Organization's Medium Term Strategy ("C/4" document), as well as the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Clear Objectives and  
Appropriate Activities

The activities undertaken by a UNESCO Chair vary according to the Chair's objectives and available resources, but might include: programme development in non-traditional areas at undergraduate or postgraduate levels; exchange of lecturers; lectures on relevant topics; research; study abroad; workshops, seminars, national, regional and international meetings/conferences; publications. Chairs should cooperate closely with ongoing UNESCO activities and programmes.

Excellence and Results-Based  
Management

Quality performance is of paramount importance to the Programme. UNESCO expects host institutions to take a results-based management approach. The intention is for Chairs and Networks to form poles of excellence and innovation along North-South and South-South axes.

Strong Institutional Support

It is important to note that an Agreement for the establishment of a UNESCO Chair is between UNESCO and the host institution and not with an individual intellectual. Strong institutional commitment is therefore paramount.

Chairholder as Head

A Chairholder is responsible for the programming, organisation, fundraising and promotion of activities. The Chairholder should have: i) academic reputation – be a renowned specialist in the domain(s) to be covered; ii) have the capacity and experience to promote cooperation at

national, regional and international levels; iii) be willing and able to mobilise resources from the private and public sectors.

#### UNESCO as Catalyst

The host institution makes individual proposals for a Chairholder and any appointment is subject to approval by UNESCO. The appointment of a Chairholder does not necessarily entail the creation of a specific post and does not always constitute an employment opportunity. A Chairholder will not be appointed until the UNESCO Chair has been officially established (i.e. after the relevant Agreement has been signed by all parties and has therefore entered into force).

#### Established at Higher Education Institutions with Designated Host

UNESCO, not being a funding agency, cannot be a major donor for the Programme. The Programme is a joint undertaking in which UNESCO plays the role of catalyst for the interested institutions. For this reason UNESCO encourages institutions to mobilise financial partners at the time they are preparing Chair proposals and also offers its services in helping mobilise resources.

#### UNITWIN Network as formal multilateral partnership agreement

UNITWIN Networks can be established at universities, other institutions of higher learning and research institutions in higher education. Usually an institution, or co-institutions, takes the lead as host, acting as a focal point to develop the Network. UNITWIN Networks may also involve higher education NGOs, foundations, and public and private sector organisations. Networks are established for an initial period of four years.

#### Relevant and Effective

A UNITWIN Network is established through a formal multilateral partnership agreement. A group of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in developed and developing countries (North-South, South-South or North-South-South) may come together to address a need in the development context; existing inter-university networks may gear their activities towards UNESCO's priorities and the needs of HEIs in the developing countries; HEIs already twinned with another HEI may decide to expand their existing bilateral agreement into a multilateral UNITWIN one; inter-university cooperation programmes may be turned into a more stable mechanism of cooperation with participating institutions agreeing to associate their network activities with the objectives of the UNITWIN UNESCO Chairs Programme.

#### Clear Objectives and Appropriate Activities

Relevance and effectiveness at national, regional and global levels are among the prime goals of the UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme. UNITWIN Networks should be sustainable and must support UNESCO programme objectives and priorities, particularly as outlined in the Organization's Medium Term Strategy ("C/4" document), as well as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

#### Excellence and Results-Based Management

The activities undertaken by a UNITWIN Network vary according to the Network's objectives and available resources, but might include: programme development in non-traditional areas at undergraduate or postgraduate levels; exchange of lecturers; lectures on relevant topics; research; study abroad; workshops, seminars, national, regional and international meetings/conferences; publications; information sharing portals; virtual communities of practice. UNITWIN Networks should cooperate closely with ongoing UNESCO activities and programmes.

Quality performance is of paramount importance to the Programme. UNESCO expects host institutions to take a results-based management approach. The intention is for Chairs and Networks to form poles of excellence and innovation along North-South and South-South axes.

**It is important to note that an Agreement for the establishment of a UNITWIN Network is between UNESCO and the host institution(s) and not with an individual intellectual(s). Strong institutional commitment from participating institutions is therefore paramount.**

## UNESCO as Catalyst

A UNITWIN Network coordinator is responsible for the programming, organisation, fundraising and promotion of activities. The network coordinator should have:

- i. academic reputation – be a renowned specialist in the domain(s) to be covered;
- ii. have the capacity and experience to promote cooperation at national, regional and international levels;
- iii. be willing and able to mobilise resources from the private and public sectors. The host institution makes individual proposals for a coordinator and any appointment is subject to approval by UNESCO. The appointment of a coordinator does not necessarily entail the creation of a specific post and does not always constitute an employment opportunity. Appointments may also be made on a rotating basis among partner institutions. A coordinator will not be appointed until the UNITWIN Network has been officially established (i.e. after the relevant Agreement has been signed by all parties and has therefore entered into force).

UNESCO, not being a funding agency, cannot be a major donor for the Programme. The Programme is a joint undertaking in which UNESCO plays the role of catalyst for the interested institutions. For this reason UNESCO encourages institutions to mobilise financial partners at the time they are preparing Network proposals and also offers its services in helping mobilise resources.





UNESCO Chair in Water Science at the University of Birmingham, Professor David Hannah, Photo: National Oceanography Centre, Southampton.



# UNESCO in the UK

UNESCO promotes a culture of peace by fostering intercultural dialogue and international cooperation through collaborative work in the fields of education, the natural and social sciences, culture, communication and information.

The UK is home to a diverse network of UNESCO projects. From Biosphere Reserves to Creative Cities, Global Geoparks to World Heritage Sites, UNESCO is closer to home than you might think. Discover UNESCO near you at [www.unesco.org.uk](http://www.unesco.org.uk).

The UK National Commission for UNESCO (UKNC) works to support the UK's contribution to UNESCO and bring the benefits of UNESCO to the UK. It is the hub for UNESCO-related matters in the UK.

The UKNC has three core priorities:

1. We provide expert, independent policy advice to UK and devolved government on UNESCO related issues.
2. We advise and support individuals and institutions in the UK, its Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies on accessing UNESCO accreditation and prizes and how to derive more value from their involvement with UNESCO.
3. We support the UK government's agenda in helping UNESCO to become more effective.

In carrying out these roles, the UKNC relies on advice and support from its expert network, including specialists in the fields of education, culture, the sciences and communication and information from across Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England.

To learn more about UNESCO and how you can get involved, contact [info@unesco.org.uk](mailto:info@unesco.org.uk) or visit [www.unesco.org.uk](http://www.unesco.org.uk)

