



UCL - Tohoku University Strategic Partner Funds 2026-27

Guidance for Applicants

Since 2019, UCL and Tohoku University (TU) have jointly supported an annual Strategic Partner Fund, establishing a strong foundation for research and education collaboration in areas of shared strength. Building on this success, in 2025, the two institutions agreed to significantly expand the partnership, with a strategic focus on **Disaster Science, Neuroscience, and Quantum Science and Technology**.

1. Aims of this call

To support this ambition, the Office of the Vice-Provost (Research, Innovation and Global Engagement) at UCL and the Global Strategy Office at TU are jointly contributing matching funds to support the expansion and scaling of collaborative education and research initiatives through this joint call for proposals. The call supports activities aligned with the shared institutional priority areas of **Disaster Science, Neuroscience and Quantum Science and Technology**.

Priority through this call will be given to proposals that are aligned with the UCL-TU vision to deepen the strategic partnership and provide a platform for long-term, large-scale and impactful collaboration. This might be achieved, for example, by facilitating the development of large-scale research partnerships, future joint education initiatives, and researcher mobility programmes (particularly for ECRs).

2. Programme / Projects

- This call invites proposals that will expand and strengthen existing partnerships between UCL and TU or initiate new partnerships that offer particular potential to deepen collaboration between the two institutions in the identified priority areas.
- All proposals must be primarily in one of the priority areas: **Disaster Science, Neuroscience, and Quantum Science and Technology**. **Interdisciplinary proposals** that integrate one or more of these areas are also welcomed.
- Proposals must be jointly led by a Lead Applicant from each institution and may include a broader team of collaborators from relevant departments and faculties at both UCL and TU, where appropriate to the proposed activities.
- Applications should demonstrate how the proposed project builds on existing or ongoing collaborations or will establish new partnerships with strong potential to deepen collaboration and increase impact. The project should provide a robust foundation for developing a sustainable, long-term strategic partnership between UCL and TU.
- Proposals should outline how the activities will strengthen the institutional partnership and provide a foundation for long-term collaboration, for example by deepening research collaboration, enhancing researcher mobility and exchange (including for ECRs), facilitating the development of applications for major external funding (e.g. Horizon Europe, JSPS, JST, AMED, and UKRI), and/or supporting collaboration with industry partners.

- It is anticipated that three joint projects will be funded in total, with a commitment to achieving balance across the priority areas, subject to quality. All proposals will be assessed by a joint review panel comprising representatives from UCL and TU.

3. Eligibility for UCL and TU participants within the scope of this call

- Applications are open to UCL and TU staff members with the following roles. Applications involving multiple departments, [Early Career Researchers](#), or staff with equivalent professional training, are welcomed:
 - a. Professor or equivalent
 - b. Associate Professor/ Reader or equivalent
 - c. Senior Lecturer/Senior Assistant Professor/Principal Researcher/Principal Research Associate or equivalent
 - d. Lecturer/Assistant Professor/Senior Research Associate or equivalent
 - e. Post Doc/Researcher/Research Associate or equivalent
- Applicants from UCL and TU must have either an open-ended contract with their respective institution or a fixed-term contract which lasts at least until the end date of the project. Principal Investigators (PIs) should apply with the expectation of remaining at UCL or TU for the duration of the project. However, if a PI's circumstances change, they must notify us as soon as possible so that we can work together to identify an appropriate solution
- Applicants are not required to have a doctorate to apply but do need to hold a role at one of the levels described above.
- PhD students are not eligible to apply but are eligible to take part in the project.
- UCL Professional Service & VP Office staff are not eligible to apply as a PI but can take part as co-applicants in the project where this supports the aims and objectives.
- Please note that in order to increase the reach and breadth of access across UCL to the 26/27 Global Engagement funding schemes (the Global Engagement Funds (GEF) and Partner Funds) the following rules are in place for UCL applicants:
 - a. You can submit a maximum of two proposals across these funding streams, either as a lead applicant or co-applicant. For example, you could submit 1 GEF proposal and 1 partner proposal, or 2 GEF proposals, or 2 partner proposals.
 - b. You can receive a maximum of 1 award per scheme as a lead applicant. For example, you could receive 1 GEF award and/or 1 partner award.
 - c. If you were the lead applicant of a proposal that received GE seed funding in 25/26, you cannot apply as a lead applicant for any 26/27 GE seed funding schemes, but you will be eligible for the 27/28 schemes.
 - d. In cases of high competition, priority may be given to applications from researchers who have not previously submitted proposals to Global Engagement funding schemes.
 - e. **Please note: a special exception to these rules can be made where there is strong potential for significant impact and/or scaling up of collaboration with a global partner based on the outcomes of 25/26 project activity.** Please contact us if you feel this applies to your activity.

4. Collaboration Activities

Funding can support a broad range of activities that advance the aims of the collaboration, including but not limited to:

- **Joint seminars, workshops, and networking events** facilitating participation from UCL and TU partners (online or in person) to strengthen existing collaboration, build new partnerships, and foster interdisciplinary research initiatives, external funding applications (e.g. Horizon Europe, JSPS, JST, AMED, UKRI), and other follow-on activities.
- **Reciprocal visits and researcher exchange** to promote expert knowledge exchange, support professional development at UCL and TU, and facilitate the development of sustainable institutional initiatives such as joint PhD summer schools, joint supervision programmes, researcher exchange schemes, and strategic partnerships with industry.
- **Mobility support for early career researchers (ECRs)**, including travel, accommodation, subsistence, and research visits between UCL and TU, together with stipends for research assistants and interns where these directly contribute to the collaboration. UCL student casual wage costs may also be supported (teaching buyouts are not eligible).
- **Preparation of major external funding proposals** through collaborative proposal development, pilot studies, consortium-building activities, and engagement with potential industrial and international partners.

5. What cannot be funded by the UCL-TU Strategic Partner Funds?

- Activity which does not involve UCL & TU partners; work for which there is already a significant existing funding stream; activity that has already happened.
- Costings should be appropriate and relevant to the activity, for example the provision of alcoholic beverages for partners is not considered a valuable use of funds, unless it can be described how hospitality is critical for the building of this relationship or necessary/culturally significant for an event e.g. a public exhibition.
- Items which are already covered by existing research or teaching grant.
- A Worktribe costing for UCL applicants is NOT necessary for UCL-TU Strategic Partner Funds.
- Teaching time buyout cannot be funded.

6. Value and Duration

- Up to three successful proposals will receive up to approximately £20,000 (£10,000 from UCL and an equivalent amount from TU). The funding will be jointly provided by UCL and TU, with each institution providing funding directly to its respective applicants. **However, only one proposal should be submitted through the link included in point 8.**
- Please note that British and Japanese universities have different financial years, and this will have an impact on the funding schedule. **Funds provided by UCL must be spent by 31 July 2027 (activities for which the funds are allocated must take place before 31 July 2027), whereas funds provided by TU must be spent by 31 March 2028.** Applicants should take this into account when planning their proposed activity.

7. Timeline

Call for Proposals	1 September 2026
Deadline for submission of proposal	11:59pm (UK time) on 9 October 2026
Communication of results to applicants	By the end of November 2026
Start date of awards (UCL)	From December 2026

Start date of awards (TU)	From April 2027
End of UCL Financial Year	31 July 2027
End of TU Financial Year	31 March 2028

8. Submission of Proposals

Proposals are to be prepared and submitted jointly using the application form which can be found on [the portal](#). **The proposal must be submitted by the lead UCL academic by 9 October 2026.**

Proposals must be submitted to UCL at the following link:

<https://form.jotform.com/geoucl/ucltohoku2627>

9. Institutional Guidelines

- Please check each university's guidelines regarding **research ethics and export controls**. Applicants are responsible for reading these guidelines and ensuring projects adhere to each university's approval policy and process.
- UCL's research guidelines can be found here:
 - a. [Research Ethics Committee at UCL guidelines](#)
 - b. [Research Integrity](#)
 - c. [Export Controls](#): *Academic activity involving international partners or travel may be subject to [export controls](#). Therefore, as part of our awarding process, UCL will need to share the project details of all successful applicants with the UCL Compliance & Assurance (C&A) team. All UCL awards are therefore provisional, subject to a review by the C&A team for export control compliance. Should the C&A team confirm that your project is subject to export controls, your award is contingent upon you being granted an export licence. In such a situation, no project activity can begin until the licencing process is complete. Please note that this only applies to the UCL project team.*
- TU's research ethics and security export control guidelines can be found here: Please check your department's ethics guidelines.
 - a. [Research Ethics \(in Japanese only\)](#)
 - b. [Security Export Control \(in Japanese only\)](#)

10. Proposal Review Process

- Proposals are received by UCL's Global Engagement team and forwarded to TU for separate review at each institution. The joint committee will convene to select the successful proposals.
- **Selection Criteria:** Both internal review committees will assess each proposal according to the following criteria:
 - a. **Aims, priority areas, and academic rationale:** How clearly does the proposal define its aims, align with one or more of the institutional priority areas, and present a strong academic rationale, based on existing collaborations or new initiatives with the potential to deepen the strategic partnership between UCL and TU?
 - b. **Strategy for scaling up the partnership:** How well does the proposal present a clear and credible strategy for strengthening and expanding the existing partnership?

- c. **Project activities, timelines and outputs:** Are the proposed activities, implementation plan, timeline, and allocation of resources appropriate, well integrated, and achievable? Are the planned outputs clearly linked to the programme / project objectives and likely to deliver meaningful outcomes?
- d. **Outcomes and impact:** What is the potential of the proposed programme to deepen the UCL-TU collaboration in priority areas and lead to lasting academic, institutional, and societal impact? Does the collaboration provide clear added value that could not be achieved by either institution working independently?
- e. **Next steps:** is there a clear pathway towards sustained collaboration beyond the lifetime of the award?

11. Communication of Results

Final results will be announced by means of a communication to the lead applicants.

12. Joint Research Agreement

Successful applicants will be required to fill in the project summary as part of the research agreement.

13. Reporting After Project Completion

All awardees must, as a condition of receiving an award under this call, complete a narrative report of achievements (of between 1 and 2 pages).

14. Queries & contacts

If you experience any problems making an online application or have any questions about the UCL-TU Strategic Partner Funds, please contact UCL's Keiko Tsunekawa, Senior Global Engagement Manager at UCL: k.tsunekawa@ucl.ac.uk or the Global Strategy Office at TU: kokusai-c@grp.tohoku.ac.jp, depending on your affiliation.