Appendix D.

from 15 May 2025

National University of Water and Environmental Engineering

Interview with Halyna Vlasiuk, Coordinator for International Cooperation

(Translated from Ukrainian)

Form of data collection: Google Form

Strategic impact and institutional priorities

Q: How has Russia's full-scale invasion affected your university's international priorities and strategies?

A: NUWEE is a technical university focused on water and environmental engineering and management, as well as natural resource governance. The university had many scientific ties with Russia and post-Soviet countries. Already in 2014, the university terminated all agreements with Russian and Belarusian universities and scientific institutions.

The university also rethought its international partnerships, significantly intensifying cooperation with partners from the EU, USA, UK, Latin America, and Asia. There arose a need for strategic alliances with universities that support the values of democracy, human rights, and academic freedom.

The university has expanded the variety of academic mobility and support programs for Ukrainian students and faculty, including adapting its programs to remote or hybrid learning formats for internally displaced persons.

In addition, volunteering and the university's third mission have become key tools for development. In particular, the war has stimulated the advancement of research at NUWEE in areas such as security, cybersecurity, humanitarian response, post-war reconstruction (including critical infrastructure, where NUWEE has highly qualified experts), psychological rehabilitation, and international law. The number of joint projects dedicated to Ukraine's recovery has also increased significantly.

Undoubtedly, we have also rethought our international communication by emphasizing the importance of the academic community for societal development and actively shaping a positive image of Ukrainian science and education on the global stage.

Q: Has the role of internationalization at your university fundamentally changed since the beginning of the war?

A: In my opinion, yes. Internationalization as a development tool has transformed into a key component of adaptation and post-war recovery of education in Ukraine. Since 2022, internationalization has become a tool for institutional resilience, security, and solidarity with the global academic community.

Partnerships have become not only a source of academic development but also a means of supporting the university during the crisis: joint projects, funding, temporary relocation of students and lecturers, infrastructure restoration, etc.

It is very important that the role of the university as a diplomatic actor has significantly increased — advocating for truth about the war, Ukrainian culture and science, and demonstrating values of resistance, freedom, and democracy.

Alternative pathways and adaptation

Q: What alternative forms of international activity (virtual mobility, online cooperation, twinning projects, international research) were implemented in your university? How effective were they?

A: Since the start of the war, alternative forms of international activity became not temporary solutions but a new level of international integration that, I believe, will remain relevant even in the postwar period.

NUWEE implements:

1. Twinning cooperation with Newcastle University (UK). As part of this, a full-semester student exchange program (already 26 students studied there), certified English courses, research projects in water and environmental restoration in Ukraine, summer schools, guest lectures, access to British digital resources, online courses, and mentoring programs were implemented.

2. COIL-courses with two Mexican universities and currently with German and Slovak universities.

3. Active implementation of virtual mobility (semesters, summer/winter schools, language/learning platforms), including cooperation with DAAD, French, and Swedish universities.

4. Online teaching and joint international research and grant projects, which increased the visibility of Ukrainian researchers in global projects.

Resilience and psychological support

Q: How has internationalization contributed to the psychological resilience of students and staff (through support networks, symbolic/material solidarity, mental health)?

A: Internationalization under full-scale war acquired a new dimension — not just an educational tool, but an important element of psychological resilience for students and staff. Participation in academic networks and European alliances fostered a sense of solidarity and community. Symbolic actions — statements, films, international conferences on war-related topics — had a major moral effect and reinforced the feeling of belonging to a global community. There was also real material support — equipment and medicine for the Armed Forces, scholarships, and teaching/study opportunities in safe environments. Various initiatives for mental health support were implemented: trainings, consultations, stress coping. Additionally, the Veteran Development Center was established at NUWEE. Participation in international projects and research also allowed individuals to shift their focus away from the war, discover new horizons, and feel part of something greater and meaningful. All of this contributed to building inner resilience, a sense of purpose, and hope — elements that are critically important in times of crisis. International projects and research allowed shifting focus from war to new horizons, creating a sense of meaning and hope — critically important during crises.

Q: Can you share an example of flexibility or resilience from your team or students in supporting international activity during the war?

A: During the full-scale war, the NUWEE team demonstrated significant flexibility and resilience in continuing international work. Despite difficult conditions, the university not only preserved but expanded its partnerships by introducing innovative forms of cooperation. A striking example is the implementation of COIL courses with partners in the Caribbean and Mexico. In 2024, for the first time during the war, an incoming mobility program within COIL and Erasmus+ was restored. The university is also collaborating with Newcastle University, UK. In August 2024, NUWEE organized an on-campus international summer school with Fordham University (USA) and Rivne-based experts in medical sciences. Through participation in Solidarity research initiatives and grants with Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, DAAD, World Bank, and others, the university was able to maintain a high level of international engagement even in war conditions.

International solidarity and partnerships

Q: What support has your university received from international partners or global educational networks during the war (resources, advocacy, technical assistance)?

A: During the full-scale war, international partners and global educational networks provided NUWEE with significant support aimed at preserving and advancing the educational process under challenging conditions — from academic mobility and research collaboration to supporting NUWEE's volunteer initiatives.

Q: How has participation in consortia (e.g., the Alliance of Ukrainian Universities) contributed to international cooperation and collective response to the challenges of war?

A: Participation in consortia such as the Alliance of Ukrainian Universities (AUU) has become a vital factor in strengthening international cooperation and enabling a collective response to the challenges of war for Ukrainian higher education institutions. Above all, such alliances provide a shared platform for strategic decision-making, experience exchange, action coordination, and the development of joint strategies in response to wartime challenges. For example, the annual AUU Forum, dedicated to university governance in wartime conditions, has become a venue for discussing issues such as talent attraction, strategic transformation, financial sustainability, and engagement with foundations and donors. At the same time, the existence of alliances like AUU supports sustainable regional development and community resilience, while also empowering Ukrainian universities to respond effectively to wartime challenges, strengthen both domestic and international cooperation, and make a significant contribution to the country's recovery and development.

Q: How have international partnerships supported physical or infrastructural resilience (humanitarian aid, equipment, campus support)?

A: During the full-scale war, international partners provided the National University of Water and Environmental Engineering (NUWEE) with substantial support aimed at strengthening the institution's physical and infrastructural resilience. Partner universities from Switzerland, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, and Poland repeatedly contributed to the university's volunteer initiatives, including the purchase of essential equipment, medicines, car parts for vehicle repairs, and more. Our partners also provide ongoing assistance in raising funds to support the Klevan Military Hospital. Additionally, in collaboration with Newcastle University (United Kingdom) within the framework of a twinning program, NUWEE implemented a series of initiatives to support its educational and research processes — including the purchase of equipment for NUWEE's hydraulic engineering laboratory. Thanks to this support, NUWEE has not only preserved but also enhanced its infrastructure, ensuring that students and faculty have access to modern conditions for learning and work, even under the most challenging circumstances.

Educational and cultural diplomacy

Q: How has your university implemented cultural and educational diplomacy strategies through internationalization during the war (promotion of Ukrainian culture, international events, media participation)?

A: During the war, the National University of Water and Environmental Engineering (NUWEE) actively implemented strategies of cultural and educational diplomacy through enhanced internationalization. The main areas of activity included:

- Promoting Ukrainian culture globally — organizing online webinars dedicated to Ukrainian language, history, and culture, specifically for foreign partners and students (including Newcastle University, King's College London, universities in Mexico, Tampere University, and others);

- Strengthening international engagement — through academic mobility programs, joint scientific initiatives, and expanding cooperation with European universities;

- Participation in global events — including webinars, conferences, and charitable initiatives that help spread the truth about Ukraine and strengthen international support. Notably, in 2023, NUWEE and Newcastle University gave a joint presentation during a strategic session on the role of internationalization at the European Association for International Education (EAIE) in Rotterdam.

Thanks to this consistent strategy, NUWEE was able not only to sustain its educational process but also to become an active voice of Ukraine on the international stage.

Post-war recovery planning

Q: Does your university plan for post-war recovery in the context of internationalization? What strategies are being developed to restore international partnerships and projects?

A: Yes, NUWEE is actively developing post-war recovery strategies with a strong emphasis on the continued internationalization of education and science. The university views international cooperation as a vital resource for recovery and development in the post-war period. It is working to renew existing agreements and establish new partnerships, particularly with countries and institutions that supported Ukraine during the war. Special attention is being given to participation in international programs and projects focused on rebuilding critical infrastructure, environmental protection, water resources, and sustainable development. An important direction is the expansion of academic mobility — for both students and faculty — to promote experience exchange, learning through new educational models, and professional development. Equally important is the digitalization and flexible formats of international education. NUWEE is also updating its international research strategy, aiming to enhance its visibility in the global

academic community through English-language programs, increased publication activity, participation in international forums, and integration into global educational platforms. The university is also engaged in projects focused on capacity building, institutional resilience, civil society development, and inclusion, as well as psychosocial support, leadership, and rebuilding educational environments — all of which aim to ensure sustainable and harmonious development not only of the academic ecosystem, but also of the region and Ukraine as a whole. Overall, NUWEE's post-war internationalization strategy seeks not just to restore pre-war levels of cooperation, but to significantly strengthen them in the context of new global challenges.

Lessons and recommendations

Q: What key lessons has your university learned about supporting internationalization in times of crisis?

A: Our university has come to understand that internationalization in times of crisis requires maximum flexibility and adaptability. The key has been a rethinking of the very essence of international cooperation — shifting from physical mobility to online formats and internal internationalization. We have realized that human capital and personal connections between faculty members and partners form the foundation of resilient international relationships. During the war, the true strength of international solidarity became evident — it helped us maintain existing partnerships and even establish new ones. At the same time, the crisis served as a catalyst for transformation — we intensified our participation in global projects, expanded the scope of cooperation, and began to position ourselves more proactively on the international stage.

Q: What recommendations would you give to other educational institutions facing war or crisis conditions?

A: Educational institutions facing war or crisis should focus on preserving human capital, maintaining flexibility, and engaging in active international cooperation. First and foremost, it is essential to support faculty and students — morally, psychologically, and organizationally — as they are the foundation of resilience. At the same time, it is crucial to maintain international connections — even informal contacts with partners can become sources of real support and resources. International activity should not be halted; on the contrary, a crisis can serve as a catalyst for rethinking and reshaping cooperation. Institutions must quickly adapt to new learning formats, make use of online tools, and build partnerships even in a remote setting. It is important to act proactively: seek international support, offer original initiatives, and participate in projects that respond to current challenges. Universities should clearly communicate their needs and, in doing so, offer not only requests but also ideas for joint action. Most importantly, internationalization must be viewed not as a separate field, but as an integrated part of university development — one that can ensure resilience even in the most difficult times.

Internationalization must transform and become a means of recovery, support, and integration into the global academic community.

Forms of internationalization

Q: How has the war affected the physical mobility of students and staff?

A: According to Resolution No. 469 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated May 9, 2023, the right to participate in physical international academic mobility has been restricted for master's and doctoral students, as well as for academic and research staff. To take part in mobility programs, grant-funded educational or research projects, they must first obtain approval from the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. At the same time, this period has stimulated the development of online, remote, and blended mobility formats, which have allowed academic integration to continue despite physical restrictions. The impact of the war on physical mobility has significantly changed the traditional approach to academic exchange, increasing the importance of online education and remote forms of international cooperation.

Q: What forms of virtual mobility have been implemented (COIL, virtual Erasmus programs)? How effective were these forms compared to physical mobility?

A: NUWEE has implemented and continues to develop the following initiatives:

- Virtual semester-based academic exchanges within DAAD-funded projects;
- COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) courses;
- Virtual summer schools and internships as part of the learning factory project with a German company;
- Online courses in collaboration with international partner universities.

One of the main advantages of virtual mobility is its accessibility and flexibility. Students and faculty have been able to participate in international projects and courses without the need to travel, making international education more accessible to those who could not engage in physical mobility due to financial or security constraints. However, virtual mobility cannot fully replace the experience of physical presence in another country. Another important aspect is the level of motivation and engagement of participants. Online formats require greater self-organization and self-discipline, which can sometimes be harder to maintain compared to physical programs where students benefit from direct interaction and hands-on learning opportunities.

Q: How have academic programs been adapted to preserve or strengthen the international component (new English-taught programs, joint/double degrees)?

A: To preserve and strengthen the international component of education, academic programs at NUWEE were adapted through the expansion and integration of English-taught courses, enabling the university to attract students from various countries even under conditions of limited mobility. In addition, dual degree programs with international universities have been actively developed, offering students the opportunity to gain international experience without leaving the country. These initiatives help maintain high educational quality and ensure the university's integration into the global academic space, providing students with access to international opportunities.

Q: Has your university implemented elements of "Internationalization at Home" during the full-scale invasion? How exactly?

A: During the full-scale invasion, NUWEE actively implemented elements of "internationalization at home" as a strategy to support international cooperation and develop students' intercultural competencies under challenging conditions. A key tool in this process was the expansion of English-taught courses, which enabled the university to attract students from Mexico and Slovakia, while also providing local students with access to international learning resources without the need for physical mobility. In parallel, the university developed online formats — including webinars, online courses, and international exchanges — which helped sustain partnerships with foreign universities and allowed students to engage with the global academic community. This also included the integration of international faculty and students into the learning process, fostering multicultural learning environments within the university. As a result, students were able to enhance their intercultural skills and deepen their understanding of global challenges while staying at home. Under conditions of restricted physical mobility, this approach became a vital means of maintaining international academic integration and preserving the university's connections with the global scientific community.

Q: Have international research projects been preserved or expanded? Has the war affected their topic or format?

A: Yes, the university succeeded not only in preserving and implementing its existing international research projects but also in increasing their number and expanding their thematic scope — particularly in areas related to water management and regenerative recovery in Ukraine. These efforts have allowed the university to actively contribute to addressing urgent national challenges while strengthening its position within the international research community. (Further details have been provided in the previous responses.)

Q: Which form of internationalization proved to be the most resilient at your university during the war? Which was the least resilient? Please rank the forms of internationalization in your institution from most resilient (5) to most vulnerable (1) and explain your choice.

A:

3 – Physical mobility

4 – Virtual mobility

2 – Curriculum internationalization

2 – Internationalization at home

3 – International research

5 – Institutional partnerships (most resilient due to trust and sustained cooperation)