

From Crisis to Learning:

UAX* After Two Years of Implementation



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Executive Summary

Launched in November 2022, as a direct response after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the UAx Platform was designed as an urgent, adaptive, and community-driven intervention to safeguard continuity in Ukrainian higher arts education during wartime. Administered by ELIA, Europe's leading multidisciplinary network in higher arts education and research and supported by the Abakanowicz Arts and Culture Charitable Foundation (AACCF), over the past two years UAx has evolved from a rapid emergency intervention into a living eco-system for international collaboration, co-learning, and solidarity.

Key Achievements

Over two years, UAx has achieved the following results:

- Student bursaries: 90 Ukrainian student-artists received €2,000 unrestricted bursaries each.
- Mentorship: Over 40 international mentors provided one-on-one or small-group guidance to 90 students in areas ranging from professional expertise and career support to emotional and psychological resilience.
- Institutional Partnerships: Fifteen Ukrainian and international higher arts institutions formed Sister School partnerships, creating joint events, mobility exchanges, co-teaching, and long-term collaboration.

At the beginning of the project, the declared aims of UAx were to:

- Enable war-affected Ukrainian art students to continue their education and artistic development in Ukraine through bursaries and mentorships.
- Strengthen Ukrainian higher arts education institutions through international partnerships and capacity-building initiatives.
- Foster sustainable and reciprocal international cooperation by creating a community of solidarity and reciprocity, and integrating Ukrainian arts institutions into ELIA and its communities.

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Key Achievements

- Community of Solidarity: UAx amplified Ukrainian voices at six of ELIA's international conferences, policy discussions, and international and Ukraine-based advocacy events, highlighting the war's impact on students and institutions.
- Capacity Building Programmes: 200+ educators, students, and cultural professionals participated in four trainings and webinars on topics such as arts and well-being, career development, higher arts education in crisis, directly strengthening institutional capacity, and sectoral resilience.
- Integration into ELIA: Fifteen Ukrainian institutions were welcomed into ELIA, becoming full members and benefiting from resources and exchange opportunities between more than 280 higher art institutions globally.

Summary of key findings, recommendations and challenges

Student experiences

Key findings	Description
Stability and agency	The €2,000 Abakanowicz Fellowships provided essential financial and emotional stability. Most students used the stipend for family support, learning tools, creative production, or health and living expenses. The flexible model enabled autonomy and dignity for the students during crisis.
Mentorship as care and growth	Students described mentorship as a crucial source of artistic and emotional support. It helped them rediscover motivation, refine creative goals, and explore new artistic languages and disciplines. Many reported improved English skills and self-confidence.
Community and belonging	UAx created a sense of connection and shared identity across institutions. Fellows valued opportunities to meet peers through UAx Days, online meetings, and joint exhibitions, a student symposium, describing the community as "a space of hope and understanding."
Professional outcomes	Several fellows showcased work internationally, developed new collaborations, or pursued postgraduate studies abroad, crediting the programme for broadening their horizons.
Challenges	Description
Uneven mentorship experiences	Some mentor-mentee pairings struggled with mismatched expectations or irregular communication.
Language and coordination barriers	Time zones, online-only contact, and limited English fluency sometimes hindered depth of exchange.
Digital fatigue	Exclusive reliance on online meetings was draining for many participants, especially after years of remote learning.

Recommendations	Description
Ensure discipline-specific, one-on-one mentorship	Improve alignment between mentors' expertise and students' study fields.
Introduce light-touch goal-setting tools	Help students define learning aims while preserving flexibility.
Establish an alumni and peer network	Sustain community bonds and create channels for continued collaboration.
Continue trust-based bursaries	Maintain flexible stipends supporting both academic and wellbeing needs.
Explore hybrid formats	Combine online mentoring with in-person or group meetings when possible.
Consider programme continuity pathways	Students expressed strong interest in maintaining the UAx community and mentorship relationships beyond one year.

Mentor experiences

Key findings	Description
Reciprocal learning	Mentors consistently described UAx as a space of mutual growth. They learned from Ukrainian students' resilience, adaptability, and perspectives on art under crisis.
Professional and pedagogical enrichment	The programme encouraged mentors to explore trauma-informed teaching, care ethics, and interdisciplinary practices. Many integrated these insights into their home institutions.
Ethical engagement	Mentors valued the project's moral dimension—"doing something meaningful beyond academia." They viewed their role as both educational and humanitarian.
Institutional representation	Acting as UAx mentors enhanced staff pride and strengthened institutional engagement with Ukraine-focused cooperation.

Challenges	Description
Limited onboarding	Several mentors requested better clarification of roles, schedules, and communication expectations.
Inconsistent mentee engagement	Some mentees were affected by instability, health issues, or displacement, leading to uneven participation with mentors.
Online-only limitations	Virtual mentorship restricted informal exchanges and relationship-building.
Limited institutional recognition	Mentors noted that the work was meaningful but often unacknowledged in workload or evaluation systems.

Recommendations	Description
Develop structured onboarding materials	Provide clear expectations, timeframes, and communication templates.
Facilitate peer exchange among mentors	Create safe spaces to share methods, challenges, and emotional experiences.
Offer training in trauma-informed and intercultural mentoring	Equip mentors to navigate sensitive contexts and diverse experiences of students studying under the war conditions.
Recognise mentorship as academic service	Encourage institutions to formally credit mentoring work in teaching loads.
Support occasional in-person or hybrid meetings	Deepen mentor–mentee relationships and strengthen motivation.

Experiences of Ukrainian Institutions

Key findings	Description
Increased capacity and visibility	Over 90% of Ukrainian institutions reported stronger international links and recognition through ELIA's network. The Sister School model offered both solidarity and professional exposure.
Curricula development	Exchanges inspired new teaching approaches, hybrid delivery methods, and student-centred teaching models.
Leadership and motivation	UAX fostered agency and optimism within Ukrainian schools, empowering staff to act despite war disruptions.
Sense of solidarity	Participation in international dialogues and UAX Days helped institutions feel supported, not isolated.
Challenges	Description
Institutional asymmetry	Unequal access to mobility grants, funding, and resources limited reciprocity with European partners.
Dependence on external coordination	Ukrainian schools sought more autonomy in planning and communication.
Sustainability pressures	Limited human and financial resources threatened long-term continuation of partnerships.
Recommendations	Description
Strengthen Ukrainian-led coordination	Increase shared governance and empower local decision-making.
Build capacity for international project management	Provide training in Erasmus+ design, intercultural leadership, and partnership facilitation.
Develop co-funded initiatives	Pursue joint grant applications with Sister Schools for sustained collaboration.
Preserve the Sister School structure	Retain it as a long-term framework for rebuilding higher arts education post-war.

Experiences of International Partner Institutions

Key findings	Description
Mutual learning	Partners gained insight into resilience, crisis pedagogy, and ethical collaboration, often transferring these lessons into their own teaching.
Collaborative outcomes	Partnerships produced exhibitions, residencies, and summer schools that included both Ukrainian and international students.
Shared purpose and pride	Institutions valued the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to Ukraine's cultural continuity.
Challenges	Description
Resource and time constraints	Limited capacity restricted long-term collaboration beyond the initial fellowship period.
Uneven engagement	Varying institutional priorities sometimes affected commitment levels.
Reliance on ELIA for facilitation	Most partnerships required mediation for coordination and follow-up.
Recommendation	Description
Formalise partnership frameworks	Establish long-term partnership plans.
Embed collaboration into curricula	Include Ukrainian perspectives in courses and co-taught modules.
Strengthen mobility and staff exchanges	Support short-term visits and artist-in-residence models.
Continue ELIA's coordination role as facilitator	Maintain central communication and alignment across schools.
Use UAx as a model for ethical internationalisation	Apply lessons to future initiatives in other crisis-affected regions.



Looking Ahead

Two years on, UAx stands as both a pilot and a prototype: a model for how higher (arts) education can act in solidarity during crisis. Across all groups, UAx demonstrated that collaboration, when rooted in care and solidarity, can become a form of recovery.

The platform's collaborative ethos redefined internationalisation in times of conflict—moving from partnership for Ukraine to partnership with Ukraine. UAx's enduring lesson is clear: collaboration is not suspended by crisis—it is sustained by community.

Its next phase, the community recommended that the project should focus on depth, shared leadership, and sustainability, ensuring the relationships and values forged during war evolve into lasting structures for renewal.



Introduction



This two-year impact evaluation report documents the experiences of students, mentors, institutions, and the wider ELIA community who took part in the UAx Platform's activities between 2022-2024. It captures lessons learned, challenges encountered, and pathways forward.

From Emergency Response to Structured Support

The UAx Platform emerged directly from the upheaval caused by Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, which brought higher arts education in Ukraine to the edge of collapse. Universities and academies faced bombardments, occupation, and closures; some relocated to safer regions, while faculty juggled teaching with displacement, caregiving, or military service. Students were thrust into precarity—coping with blackouts, disrupted internet, limited access to studios and materials, and in many cases forced migration or military enlistment. Academic calendars were suspended, admissions frozen, and international exchanges stalled, creating uncertainty about whether institutions could survive at all.

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In this context, members of the ELIA mobilised rapidly. What began as letters of solidarity, ad hoc residencies, and online teaching offers quickly coalesced into a coordinated effort to support Ukrainian students and institutions sustain educational continuity. Out of this momentum, UAx was conceived not as a one-off relief measure but as an adaptive platform for connection, capacity-building, and long-term recovery.

Over two years, UAx evolved from crisis relief into a living platform for resilience, co-learning, and solidarity. Its design combines student financial support, a student mentorship programme, institutional partnerships, and regular community gatherings to create an infrastructure for learning, care, and action in wartime. As of 2025, the platform includes 15 Ukrainian institutions, 18 international partner institutions (across Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States), 90 Ukrainian fellows, and more than 40 international mentors.

A Platform, Not a Relocation Programme

From the beginning, Ukrainian partners stressed that most students did not want evacuation abroad, but needed support, to continue their education at home. As Vasyl Kosiv, Rector of the Lviv National Academy of Arts stated during an ELIA event in May 2022, opportunities abroad risked accelerating the ‘institutional destruction’ of Ukrainian schools: *“We need support for art education here in Ukraine. Not a ride. Not an evacuation.”*

This perspective shaped UAx’s design. Rather than a relocation scheme, it was conceived as an infrastructure of solidarity—anchored in Ukraine while connected internationally. Students needed bursaries – to afford basic educational continuity, mentors – to expand their practice, and institutional partnerships – to keep their schools functioning within a wider academic community. Early consultations confirmed that sustaining links with home institutions was as critical as opening access to international resources.

As one Ukrainian participant later reflected, *“It wasn’t about escaping—it was about continuing. UAx gave students tools to stay present and move forward”* (UA Representative 2). UAx thus positioned itself as a community for solidarity, mutual learning, care, and shared agency across borders.



Initial Design and Strategic Priorities

UAX was launched in November 2022 with a multi-strand concept that reflected both emergency needs and long-term vision. Its design combined immediate relief for students and institutions with mechanisms for lasting integration into the European higher arts education community.

- In the short term, it was designed to strengthen the resilience of art universities and academies in Ukraine, providing support during times of crisis and recovery. This included assisting art students through emergency bursaries, reciprocal mentoring, knowledge sharing, and capacity-building within their institutions.
- In the long term, the UAX Platform was designed to contribute to the development of Ukrainian art universities and academies as active members of the European higher arts education community. It sought to create sustainable international cooperation that enhanced the quality of educational programmes.

The platform's core components reflected this dual mission:

- Abakanowicz Fellowships gave 90 students €2,000 each in unrestricted support, often used for essential equipment, living costs, or project development.
- The Mentorship Programme paired fellows with international artists, curators, and educators, offering creative, professional, and emotional guidance.
- Sister School Partnerships matched Ukrainian and international institutions, creating structures for collaboration, joint projects, and capacity-building.
- Community-building activities such as monthly meetings and UAX Days enabled knowledge exchange, shared advocacy, and cross-institutional solidarity.
- ELIA Membership brought Ukrainian schools into one of Europe's largest art education networks, ensuring access to events, resources, and an advocacy channel.

From the outset, UAX was not framed as a short-term intervention, but as a living platform: one that would evolve with its members, adapt to Ukraine's changing realities, and grow based on trust, feedback, and co-creation.

Timeline of Key Milestones

Date	Milestone
March – May 2022	First consultations with Ukrainian rectors and faculty (Lviv, Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa) during ELIA events; need identified for in-place support rather than relocation
July 2022	Proposal submitted and partnership with the Abakanowicz Arts and Culture Charitable Foundation (AACCF) confirmed
November 2022	Public launch of UAX at the ELIA Biennial in Helsinki (first UAX Day); community consultation and first cohort of 5 Sister School pairs announced

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March 2023	First formal UAx meeting online with five Sister School pairs; monthly meetings established as a backbone of the platform
May 2023	Second UAx Day at ELIA Academy in Évora, Portugal of five Sister School pairs, with a focus on daily realities of Ukrainian institutions and criteria for fellowship/mentorship selection
September 2023	Abakanowicz Fellowships 2023 (30 fellows, ten mentors) announced; selection of five additional Ukrainian Sister Schools announced
October – December 2023	Third UAx Day at ELIA Leadership Symposium in Manchester, UK, dedicated to strategy and community-building; selection of international Sister Schools for 2024
March-May 2024	Onboarding of five new Sister School pairs 2024; fundraising kick-off for the next phase of UAx; active advocacy efforts expanded; Abakanowicz Fellowships 2024 (30 fellows, fifteen mentors) announced;
November 2024	Fourth UAx Day in Milan hosts 50+ participants, including fellows, mentors, and new Ukrainian members; the event marks two years of the platform and launches discussions on the next phase (2026–2028)
December 2024	Cohort expands towards 30 Sister Schools; Evaluation activities continue, with a focus on scaling lessons learned and securing future sustainability; active fundraising efforts begin with a Creative Europe grant application being prepared to secure the next phase of UAx.

Each of these milestones contributed not only to the programme's outputs but also a growing sense of community ownership. UAx is a peer network of institutions and individuals, many of whom have been shaping the platform's development in real time.

* How We Listened and Evaluated

The UAx Platform has been evaluated annually between December 2022 and May 2025 by the UAx team, and yearly evaluation reports were produced to offer insight into the activities undertaken by the project. A request was made by the ELIA wider community to evaluate the project's impact after more than two years into its implementation. Hence, between January and May 2025, a Research Assistant joined the UAx team to support the UAx Manager in carrying out a Two-Year Impact Evaluation Study.

This study combines quantitative, qualitative, and documentary evidence to capture both lived experiences across different stakeholder groups and outcomes of the projects in terms of activities undertaken.

Emphasis was placed on triangulating multiple voices, with particular care to highlight underrepresented experiences (e.g., students with partial participation, mentors with limited contact, institutions with low capacity).



Purpose and scope of the report

This report presents the results of a two-year impact evaluation, drawing on surveys, interviews, and testimonials with students, mentors, and institutions from two cohorts between 2022 and 2024. It assesses how effectively UAx has:

- Enabled students to continue their education and creative practice during wartime.
- Facilitated meaningful mentorship across artistic, professional, and emotional dimensions.
- Strengthened Ukrainian institutions through international partnerships and capacity-building.
- Established frameworks for sustainable collaboration, policy engagement, and cross-border community.

Overview of stakeholders

The report draws insights from responses of the four core stakeholder groups involved in UAx:

- **Students** who received Abakanowicz Fellowships and mentorship support through UAx between 2023 and 2024.
- **Mentors** who guided these students across creative, technical, and emotional dimensions between 2023 and 2024.
- **Representatives of the Ukrainian institutions** paired in Sister School partnerships between 2022 and 2024.
- **Representatives of the International Partner Institutions** paired in Sister School partnerships between 2022 and 2024.

Each section explores these groups' experiences, challenges, and recommendations. The report concludes with lessons learned and recommendations for the future of UAx and similar initiatives.

Data sources

The evidence base reflects multiple layers of participation and engagement:

Type of data	Number of responses
Survey (4 groups)	Mentors – 10 responses (survey 2025) and 7 responses (survey 2024) Students – 23 responses (2025 fellows survey) and 16 responses (survey 2024) Ukrainian institutions – 12 institutional responses (survey 2025) Non-Ukrainian institutions – 8 institutional responses (survey 2025)
Interviews (22)	ELIA staff and facilitators – 6 interviews International partner institutions – 4 interviews Ukrainian institutions – 3 interviews Students – 6 interviews Mentors – 3 interviews

Testimonials	18 first-person reflections from 2023 Abakanowicz Fellows highlighting individual pathways through the programme
Project documentation and observation	21 monthly meeting summaries 6 UAx Day reports (Helsinki 2022, Évora 2023, Manchester 2023, Milan 2024, plus follow-ups) Founding documents (UAx 2022 proposal, concept papers, steering group notes)

Analysis

Data were analysed through thematic coding of transcripts, survey responses, and meeting records, triangulated across sources to ensure validity. Special care was taken to highlight voices that might otherwise be underrepresented: students with partial participation, mentors with limited engagement, and institutions with constrained capacity.

The analysis focused on six core dimensions of impact. The six evaluation dimensions were not chosen arbitrarily. Rather, they emerged from a combination of (1) the founding principles of UAx, (2) the lived realities voiced by students, mentors, and institutions during consultations, and (3) established international evaluation standards*. Together, they allowed the evaluation to capture both measurable outcomes (e.g., participation, institutional capacity) and less tangible but equally critical aspects (e.g., care, belonging, resilience) that define education in wartime contexts:

Evaluation Dimension	Focus Areas
Relevance	Did the platform address stakeholder needs during wartime?
Access & Equity	Who was able to participate? What barriers emerged?
Effectiveness	What worked well, and under what conditions?
Care & Belonging	How did relationships, safety, and peer support shape outcomes?
Capacity & Learning	What individual and institutional growth occurred?
Sustainability	What structures, relationships, and practices are enduring or replicable?

Each stakeholder section in this report is structured around these six dimensions, with evidence presented through data, narrative, and creative testimony.

*Relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability echo the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria, widely used across humanitarian and education projects to access impact. Access & equity reflects Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe's emphasis on inclusion and participation. Care & belonging draws from UNESCO and INEE frameworks on education in emergencies, where wellbeing and relational safety are considered essential. Capacity & learning builds on arts education evaluation research, which recognises resilience, skill-building, and institutional strengthening as long-term impacts. Together, these dimensions situate UAx within both global standards and the lived realities of wartime higher arts education.

Ethical Considerations and Positionality

Capturing the project's impact was not a straightforward task. The work unfolded in an emotional and sensitive context, with participants—especially Ukrainian students and institutional staff—learning and collaborating under conditions of war, displacement, trauma, and institutional strain. It required particular attention to ethics and reflexivity.

To ensure that, the following was considered in the evaluation approach:

- Participants' voices were central, especially those of Ukrainian students and institutional facilitators. Space was made for ambivalence, critique, and expressions of fatigue alongside appreciation.
- Voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw were ensured in all surveys and interviews.
- The evaluation team's positionality was explicitly acknowledged: Composed of both Ukrainian and international staff, the team navigated different levels of privilege, vulnerability, and responsibility. To foster openness, for example, all interviews were conducted by the research assistant without the UAx Manager present, ensuring that participants felt free to speak candidly.
- All responses were treated with strict confidentiality. This dual perspective enriched the analysis but also required continuous awareness of power asymmetries and visibility within the evaluation process.

In keeping with the ethos of UAx itself, the evaluation was conducted as an act of care, accountability, and solidarity. It not only sought to measure outcomes but also to honour the lived experience of participants and generate insights for future practice.



Building the Platform Together

This chapter turns the lens inward, exploring how UAx was experienced by those who carried and shaped the platform: the UAx team, ELIA staff, and community facilitators who guided its implementation. Their reflections reveal more than the challenges of managing a cross-border initiative under wartime conditions, also touching on the personal and institutional transformations that emerged in the process. From the emotional labour of accompaniment to the practical work of building structures for resilience, these voices highlight how the platform has left a mark on its intended beneficiaries as well as those who sustained it.



As ELIA Team member 2 explained, *“There was enormous support from the community... everybody wanted to do more. But we also started to hear directly from Ukrainian institutions that offering safe havens abroad was not enough—they wanted support at home.”*

First Encounters and Needs: Early exchanges, especially with the Lviv National Academy of Arts (LNAA), revealed a core insight: support was needed in Ukraine, not just abroad. Students and staff were determined to continue their studies despite air raids, blackouts, and displacement. At ELIA’s PIE Conference in Bratislava and the Leadership Symposium in Tallinn in 2022, Ukrainian colleagues shared both hardship and determination. As ELIA Team member 1 recalled, *“They were experiencing a huge brain drain... they [LNAA] had taken in colleagues from Kharkiv, trying to keep their programmes alive, and were really looking for resources to help themselves.”*

The Turning Point: The idea of a platform combining emergency relief with long-term collaboration emerged soon thereafter. Facilitator 1, then a member of the UAX steering group, recalled how *‘it started with a lunch’* with the director of the AACCF. That conversation crystallised the possibility of building something more ambitious than ad hoc aid—a platform rooted in solidarity, mentorship, and institutional partnerships. *“From that dream, UAX was born.”*

The early vision for UAX was both practical and ambitious. It focused on:

1. Emergency bursaries to keep Ukrainian students enrolled despite the war
2. Mentorship and Sister School partnerships to connect Ukrainian students and staff with peers across Europe
3. Institutional capacity-building to preserve and strengthen Ukraine’s higher arts education for the future

As Facilitator 2 and one of the facilitators of the UAX Days, reflected, *“I’m a strong believer that art and culture can help foster resilience, dialogue, and hope. This community was built exactly for that.”*

These encounters and conversations profoundly shaped ELIA’s leadership. What began as a crisis response quickly became a commitment; not only to help Ukrainian institutions survive but also to keep the Ukrainian students engaged, visible, and connected to the wider European higher arts education community. Moreover, to keep learning from and staying open to each other.

Establishing the Platform: Co-Creation and Early Implementation

A small ELIA team quickly went to work. Over the following weeks, they shaped the UAX concept into a multi-strand platform: pairing Ukrainian schools with Sister Schools across Europe, providing direct bursaries to Ukrainian students, and granting access to ELIA’s membership and advocacy spaces. One principle guided all design choices: the support had to be student-centred and flexible.

As Facilitator 1 put it, *“We said, ‘We’re going to give them money directly. No strings attached.’”* Initially, Ukrainian partners were hesitant, asking what rules would govern the money. *“We said, ‘None.’ And eventually, they agreed: ‘We need to trust our students.’”* This trust-based model became a defining feature of UAx.

By September 2022 the proposal was approved, and the foundation requested an immediate launch. *“They said, ‘We would like you to start right away and to do something for the biennial 2022.’”* With barely six weeks to prepare, the ELIA Team scrambled to arrange logistics for the first delegation of Ukrainian rectors. An airline strike forced last-minute rerouting through Poland, but against all odds, the first group reached the ELIA Biennial in Helsinki. As ELIA Team member 1 remembered: *“We met everybody for the first time for lunch at a little restaurant in Helsinki... it was a very emotional moment that we had pulled this off at such record speed.”*



Operationally, the early months were described as ‘a train that was on a fast track’ by ELIA Team member 3. The priority was to select first the platform manager, secure the pilot cohort, and establish Sister School relationships. The project’s momentum surprised even its founders: *“It went very fast,”* ELIA Team member 3 said, *“and it felt very dear in that context.”*

Within a matter of weeks, UAx had evolved from a sketch on a napkin to a fully-fledged platform connecting institutions, students, mentors, and funders across borders and disciplines. From the outset, however, speed did not come at the expense of values. Trust, mutuality, and cultural respect were built into the architecture of the platform. As ELIA Team member 3 reflected: *“It wasn’t a mobility programme. It was a commitment.”*

Building a Living and Adaptive Platform

From the outset, UAx was never conceived as a static project, but as a living, adaptive platform—one that could evolve in response to the rapidly shifting realities of war, institutional needs, and student voices. Central to this adaptability was facilitation. The first gathering in Helsinki set the tone, as facilitators introduced participatory methods designed to bridge cultural, political, and institutional divides. As Facilitator 2 recalled: *“There was a real hunger for connection. We didn’t need PowerPoints—we needed presence, translation, and trust.”*

Early sessions prioritised multilingual access, emotional safety, and inclusive participation, laying the groundwork for a culture of shared ownership and horizontal dialogue where student voices were central. The platform grew through a process of ‘learning by doing’. Every element—from student selection protocols to mentorship support structures—was refined through real-time feedback loops. Facilitator 1: *“We did individual consultations with every school. We asked: Are you okay with this? What do you need? It wasn’t top-down.”* This responsiveness allowed UAx to move from emergency relief towards a more structured and sustainable system while keeping its relational ethos intact.

Scaling was gradual and relational. ELIA Team member 1: *“We started with five schools and built up, layer by layer. That was key; relationship first, structure second.”* Shared experiences—monthly meetings, mentorships, and joint responses to crises—deepened ties and reinforced the community. When Ukrainian partner institutions faced acute crises such as bombings or power outages, the platform provided empathetic solidarity while continuing to deliver on its core educational goals.

Over time, operational practices also matured, gradually settling into more efficient workflows, with clearer processes for selecting and matching students, mentors, and Sister Schools. This brought stability and clarity to stakeholders, many of whom initially struggled to distinguish whether UAx was primarily humanitarian or educational. As Facilitator 2 reflected, *“They [the institutions] acknowledged that ELIA wasn’t about practical help like money or generators, but about being part of a real community.”*

Shared experiences, including monthly meetings, mentorship programmes and crisis response efforts, deepened these ties and strengthened the sense of community. UAx’s responsiveness was tested repeatedly, especially when Ukrainian partner institutions faced acute crises, such as bombings or power outages. The team offered empathetic support while still delivering on core goals.

As the platform matured, Ukrainian institutions began to embed its values into their own practices. Facilitator 1 observed that *“mentorships, in particular, led to shifts in academic approaches,”* moving schools towards more student-centred and flexible models. Institutions also revised curricula and launched new Erasmus+ partnerships. These outcomes reveal that UAx went beyond being a temporary wartime measure and became a catalyst for longer-term educational reform.

Within the international arts education community, UAx gained visibility as a model of meaningful crisis response. What began as an emergency initiative is now recognised as a replicable strategic format for engaged and ethical collaboration, garnering stronger buy-in from ELIA members, attracting new partners, and drawing attention from international stakeholders.



ELIA's Transformation through UAx

For ELIA and its members, the UAx Platform marked a turning point in how a cultural and educational network could act during crisis. It demonstrated that ELIA was a convener of exchanges and conferences as well as a body capable of rapid, ethical, and activist mobilisation in the face of geopolitical disruption. As ELIA Team member 2 observed: *"It opened up the advocacy channels of ELIA... and extended its support through the network in a new way."*

The experience reshaped ELIA's identity. What had once been primarily a facilitator of academic dialogue became an organisation able to stand for values and solidarity. Facilitator 1 described this as a 'moment of growth' for the organisation itself: *"This wasn't networking as usual. It changed our mission. It went deeper into values, into solidarity."*

UAx also became a catalyst for organisational learning, requiring ELIA to navigate:

- Emergency response planning, making decisions quickly under conditions of uncertainty
- Membership practices, by bringing Ukrainian institutions into the network not as guests but as active partners shaping its direction
- Advocacy and policy engagement, leveraging ELIA's voice to emphasise the importance of arts education in wartime and in crisis-affected societies

As ELIA Team member 3 reflected, *"It brought Ukraine into ELIA—not just as a focus, but as a part of the future."*

Through UAx, ELIA discovered new dimensions of its purpose. The project diversified the organisation, embedding resilience, inclusion, and solidarity into its core. ELIA Team member 1: *"We'd never worked in a situation like this before—it changed how we think about inclusion and crisis."*

Perhaps UAx's most lasting legacy for ELIA is the precedent it set: showing how arts networks can mobilise in times of crisis. It reminded the organisation—and its members—that arts education is not only about training professionals but also about sustaining communities of care, courage, and creativity. In the wake of UAx, ELIA has begun to consider how to deepen its advocacy and programming in regions facing conflict or marginalisation, ensuring that resilience and solidarity remain central to its mission.

Navigating Complexities

While UAx has achieved remarkable outcomes, several challenges have shaped its journey and continue to require attention for long-term sustainability.

One early difficulty lay in the imbalance of leadership between ELIA and Ukrainian partners. Initial decision-making leaned heavily towards the ELIA side. Over time, deliberate efforts were made to rebalance power, such as hiring an all-Ukrainian UAx team, but interviewees emphasised the need for clearer systems that guarantee Ukrainian institutions greater ownership in designing and steering activities.

Similarly, the process of matching Sister Schools was not always optimal. Pairings were made under intense time pressure, and not all partnerships flourished equally. As ELIA Team member 4 recalled, *“If we had started with 15 schools at once, it would have been impossible to build the personal relationships we needed. Building layer by layer worked—but some pairings would have benefitted from more cross-checking and support to clarify expectations.”*

Sustaining depth of engagement also proved resource intensive. The relational model that defined UAx—trust-building, mentorship, shared learning—was praised as transformative but also described as fragile. ELIA Team member 4 noted that *“with 15 schools, it becomes much harder to keep the same level of engagement. The flame doesn’t just keep burning—it needs constant fuel.”* This highlighted the challenge of scaling up while maintaining the quality of connections.

Facilitators also pointed to the challenge of visibility and storytelling. Despite its success, UAx’s broader narrative—as a replicable model of solidarity and higher education in crisis—remains under-shared internationally. As Facilitator 2 observed, *“It’s not just about networking. What UAx created was a sense of belonging, of not being alone. That’s a story worth telling more widely.”* Stronger communication of lessons learned could help secure partnerships and inspire other networks.



Student Experiences



This section explores why Ukrainian art students chose to join the UAx Abakanowicz Fellowship during a period of deep instability and uncertainty. It examines their motivations and expectations at the time of application, the challenges they faced in navigating the process, and how the fellowship offered both practical and symbolic support.

Through survey data, interviews, and personal testimonies, it reveals how students viewed UAx as a way to restore continuity in their education, reconnect with creative purpose, and regain a sense of belonging amid disruption.

The section also highlights lessons from the application phase and students' suggestions for improving accessibility, transparency, and support in future cycles.

Grounding in Uncertainty: Why Students Joined

Motivations for applying and expectations

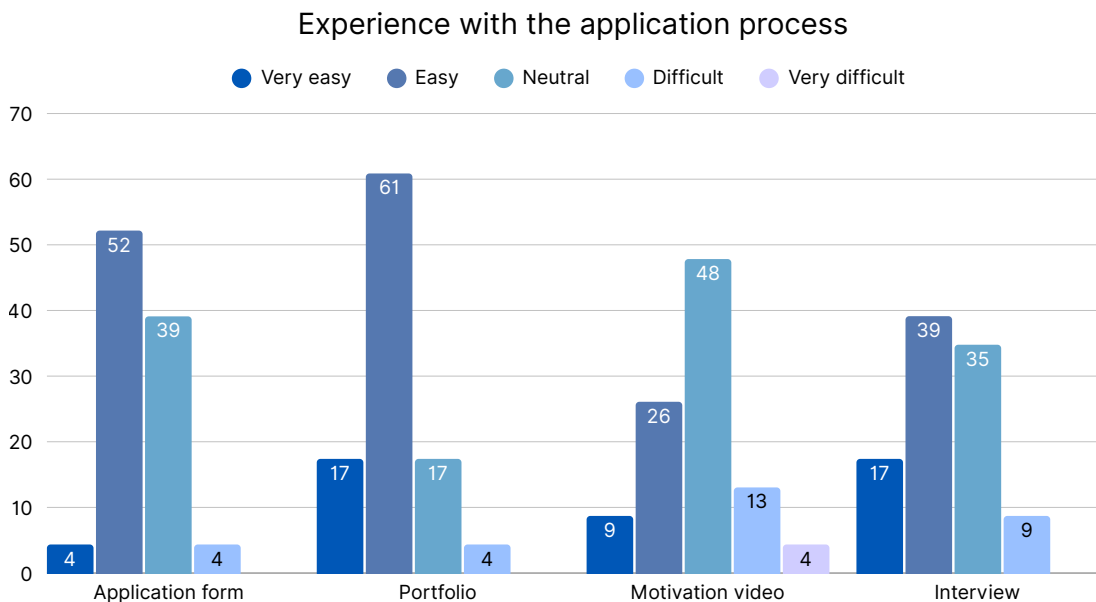
When the UAx Abakanowicz Fellowship was announced, students were navigating a period of profound uncertainty. The war disrupted not only their physical safety and living conditions but also their sense of identity and artistic direction. For many, creative practice had been pushed to the margins by displacement, institutional upheaval, and emotional exhaustion. Some were even considering leaving the arts altogether, questioning the relevance of a creative career in such circumstances.

Students applied for a fellowship for a variety of reasons: the chance to complete creative student projects, connect with mentors with international backgrounds, access peer networks, or simply satisfy their inner desire for the challenge. For some, it was an opportunity to revive a practice that had been forgotten under stress and disruption: *“I was on the edge of leaving the arts completely—UAX turned that around.”* (Student 1) For others, it offered purpose and a way to continue their artistic path.

Against this backdrop, UAX appeared as a form of symbolic recognition—a message that the students’ work still mattered, that their artistic voices were still needed, and that they had not been forgotten. The fellowship offered a sense of continuity amid rupture and a bridge back to the creative paths many thought they had lost: *“When I received a positive response from UAX... it gave me a boost, and then my career took off.”* (Student 2)

Application experience

Most students considered the application process fair, transparent, and well-structured. Overall, 60.8% described their experience as very satisfactory and 30.4% as satisfactory. Fellows especially appreciated the clear structure of the call, the inclusion of diverse application formats, and the responsiveness of the UAX team. For some, it was their first time applying to such a programme. *“We didn’t know what we were doing at first, like blind kittens,”* Student 3 recalled. Yet most agreed that the process went smoothly and was relatively easy to navigate. The application process involved an application form, artistic portfolio, motivation video and a 20-min interview.



Source: Student Survey, 2025.

While most students experienced the application process as fair and manageable, there were calls for greater clarity around expectations, selection criteria, and technical requirements.

For some, the process felt daunting—a mix of unfamiliar platforms, unclear guidelines, and uncertainty about the rules: *“I felt that the form with student grades complicated the application process, and that it was difficult to obtain the transcript from the dean's office, sometimes taking a long time.”* (Student 4)

Pre-application sessions were particularly valued: over 60% of students who responded to the survey described these meetings as very useful, though many still felt more detailed guidance would have helped them prepare with greater confidence.

Challenges and Suggestions from Improvement of the Application Process

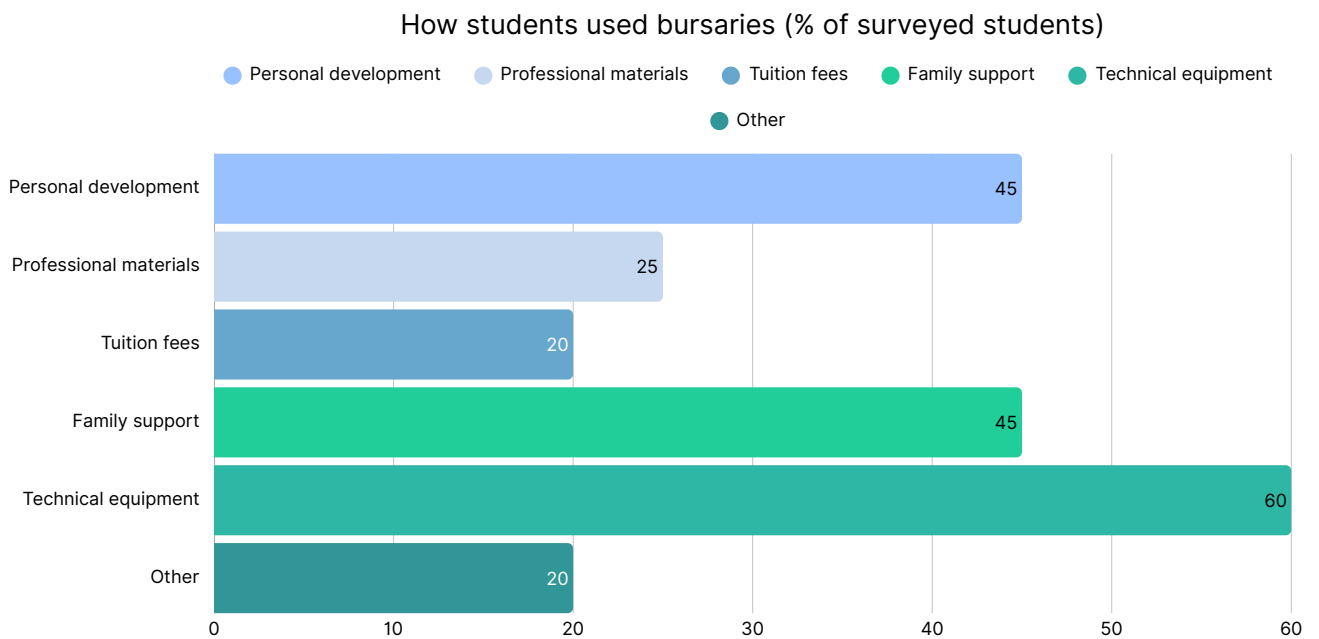
Challenges	Suggestions
Navigating the application language and terminology	Provide clearer guidelines and FAQs in an accessible language (Ukrainian)
Compiling portfolios under time pressure	Offer earlier announcements and extended preparation timelines
Filming motivation videos or undergoing interviews	Share sample questions, tips, and examples of strong submissions
Technical barriers (poor internet connection, limited devices)	Record all info sessions/webinars and ensure asynchronous access
Uncertainty about expectations and decision-making	Publish evaluation criteria and examples of successful applications
Limited formats for submission	Allow more flexible, non-traditional formats for creative expression

Empowered by Support: The Fellowship's Transformative Role

How students used the stipend

For many fellows, the UAx Abakanowicz Fellowship was more than financial support—it was a stabilising force in times of profound uncertainty. At the start of the academic year, students received bursaries of €2,000 each, which they primarily used to sustain their studies. Many invested in tools and resources essential for creative and academic work, such as laptops, professional cameras, and drawing tablets. Besides improving the quality of their work, these purchases enabled participation in specialised training, including a 2D animation course or vocal and piano lessons.

Some students relied on their bursaries to cover essential living costs such as rent, food, or medical treatment, including medical rehabilitation. One fellow explained that her health condition had long affected her studies, but after investing in rehabilitation she was finally able to participate in dance and performance classes without pain. Across interviews, there was consistent recognition of the bursary’s critical role: the unrestricted stipend gave students freedom to invest in professional equipment, fund production costs, and travel for projects. This flexibility enabled them to realise more ambitious work—from diploma films to international exhibitions—that would otherwise have been beyond reach. For many, the bursary served as a safety net, easing daily worries and allowing greater focus on creative and professional growth. As one student put it, *“90% of my fellowship went to my diploma film; I wouldn’t have been able to shoot it otherwise”* (Student 3).



Source: Student Survey, 2025.

How students used the stipend

At its core, the programme’s impact lay in its flexible nature. Without rigid funding categories or reporting requirements, students were free to decide how best to use their bursaries. Several described this freedom as an invitation to take creative risks. Once basic needs were secured, they could finally invest in long-postponed materials, enrol in specialised courses to expand their skills, or travel to pursue artistic plans. This autonomy translated into a tangible expansion in the scope, ambition, and quality of their projects: films were completed, performances staged, and installations realised—often marking milestones in students’ artistic journeys. As one fellow reflected, *“The money gave me time and space, and that’s when the real work began”* (Student 3). For many, the fellowship shifted their experience from merely coping under financial strain to imagining, building, and daring to take risks again.

Flexibility as a form of respect and trust

A strong sense of recognition and trust accompanied the fellowship. Because the bursaries were unrestricted, students felt genuinely empowered to decide how best to use them. This autonomy translated directly into impact. The freedom to choose—what to spend on, what to prioritise, even when to pause and rest—offered something often absent in crisis funding: dignity. They were supported both materially and as autonomous individuals with complex needs. That recognition carried deep emotional weight.

“It wasn’t just funds. It was recognition.” (Student 6)

“The stipend was more than money. It was a message: we see you, we trust you.”
(Student 3)

Relieving financial anxiety: reduction of stress and increased agency.

The financial support eased students’ burdens, enabling them to focus on their studies and creative work. It showed that the Fellowship Programme improved educational and career opportunities as well as enhanced overall quality of life. Knowing students could rely on a bursary reduced the constant psychological strain—a vital relief in the context of war and survival. Remarkably, many students chose to invest in their well-being, using the bursary to recover their mental health and rebuild daily structure. In these moments, the fellowship became a bridge back to life itself, not just to art.

“The grant gave me a safety cushion; I could finally choose myself and my work.”
(Student 3)

“I could finally finish my graduation film—and sleep without anxiety.” (Student 3)

The ability to stabilise first, before producing work, proved essential. Rather than demanding immediate outputs, UAx created space for students to heal, reflect, and return to their practice on their own terms. This, in turn, led to more meaningful, mature, and confident artistic outcomes.

Suggestions for Improvement

While students responded positively to the fellowship’s design, they also suggested ways to enhance its impact:

- Introduce optional, tailored funds for specific needs such as international travel, exhibition costs, or language learning
- Maintain flexibility, but offer voluntary support with budgeting or project planning, particularly for those less experienced in managing grants

These suggestions highlight a nuanced appreciation of the programme’s value and potential. Students were not calling for stricter rules or additional controls; rather, they sought more targeted forms of support that would build on the programme’s core strengths: trust, flexibility, and care.

Mentorship: Building Trust, Skills, and Confidence

The platform's mentoring support has reshaped how students perceive themselves and their futures. Exposure to advanced professional practices and professional feedback pushed many to refine their craft. One fellow noted that mentorship combined with financial backing significantly improved their technical skills, resulting in recognition at film festivals and opening doors to post-graduation job opportunities.

The programme also shaped decisions about further education and career pathways: some students expressed greater motivation to pursue master's studies, while others aimed to align their work more closely with international standards. These choices were driven both by hands-on experiences and by exposure to global artistic trends. Taken together, the fellowship's elements—mentorship, networking, and resources—have nurtured stronger professional identities. This transformation is clear in how students describe their journeys: from early doubts about the platform's relevance to confidently embracing it as a pivotal part of their artistic and professional development.

Interaction frequency and types of support received

Most students described their mentorship experiences as deeply meaningful, with around half of survey respondents reporting high satisfaction with their mentoring relationships. Meetings typically took place every two weeks, though frequency varied depending on availability, initiative, and the fit between mentor and mentee. While one-to-one sessions were the most valued, group mentoring also provided valuable insights when guided with clarity and care.

Mentors supported students across a wide range of areas, from artistic critique and project development to technical skills, career planning, and emotional encouragement. The quality of these interactions often depended on how closely mentors' expertise matched students' disciplines and how clearly expectations were set at the outset.



"My mentor helped me see myself as a filmmaker, not just a student." (Student 3)

"Mentorship made me more confident; even my film looks different because of it." (Student 3)

"Sometimes we just needed someone to ask the right questions." (Student 2)

Challenges and variability

Although overall satisfaction with the mentorship component was high, with over 60% of respondents reporting they were very satisfied, it was also the area where the greatest variation emerged. Many students developed deep, lasting relationships with their mentors, but others struggled with misalignment or limited contact. *“Unfortunately, I couldn’t establish a connection with my mentor; there were very few meetings, so I can’t really answer this question”* (Student 6).

Group mentoring brought both opportunities and challenges. When students came from very different disciplines or skill levels, the lack of alignment made it difficult to receive relevant feedback or build rapport.

“The problem was the different levels of participants in the group. It was hard to bring everyone to the same line.” (Student 6)

“From what I heard from peers, it would be better if everyone had mentors from their own field and had one-on-one sessions.” (Student 3)

Students also pointed to uneven levels of engagement. In some cases, mentors became unresponsive or failed to initiate communication.

“The match with the mentor was problematic—no chat, no communication, they disappeared. We didn’t understand the direction.” (Student 6)

Even when meetings took place, mismatched expectations sometimes created friction. Some mentors approached the role with a highly structured agenda, while others adopted a casual or hands-off approach. Without clear guidance or mutual agreement on goals, students were left uncertain about how to navigate the relationship—especially those less confident in initiating conversations. A few described the emotional toll of repeated outreach with little or no response, which not only slowed project development but also undermined the sense of trust and recognition the programme aimed to foster.

These challenges point to the need for a minimum level of structure—without becoming rigid—to balance mentor and student autonomy while ensuring that every participant can rely on consistent, meaningful support.

Mentorship quality and accessibility

As noted earlier, some fellows encountered difficulties that the programme could address. Several suggested that individual mentorship would be more beneficial for both mentors and mentees. Greater attention during the selection process—particularly aligning mentors and students by discipline and interests—would help set clearer expectations from the outset.

Other recommendations included introducing regular check-ins, such as mid-programme reviews, to identify challenges early and provide timely solutions. In addition, developing a light-touch monitoring system could help track mentorship engagement and offer support whenever difficulties arise, ensuring that both mentors and students feel guided and sustained throughout the process.

Becoming: Confidence, Direction, Belonging, and Self-Worth

Participation in the Abakanowicz Fellowship represented a significant milestone for students. Beyond technical learning, the programme fostered profound personal development. It shaped their artistic journeys and helped them begin to see themselves as professionals: artists and creators. The combination of financial, mentoring, and community support enabled fellows to move from uncertainty and fragmentation towards confidence, clarity, and growth.

Survey findings highlight these transformation:

- Nearly 70% of mentees reported improved confidence and self-worth
- 87% reported a stronger artistic identity and clearer professional direction
- 74% reported gains in English proficiency and project management skills

The mentorship component had both emotional and professional impact. Many students emphasised the moral support and encouragement they received during difficult times. Some described greater confidence and a stronger sense of value, while others highlighted the sense of hope and self-belief that participation gave them. One student, for example, shared how mentorship helped her overcome insecurities about her English skills and embrace new opportunities. Across testimonies, fellows consistently reported a renewed sense of purpose, which translated into motivation to pursue their goals and a stronger belief in their artistic identity.

"My English improved to a confident B2+, and I stopped watching dubbed films."
(Student 4)

"I stopped apologising for calling myself an artist." (Student 5)

Mentorship also facilitated concrete skill development and artistic exploration. Students reported improved delegation, networking, and curatorial skills; deeper knowledge of cultural heritage and artistic disciplines such as architecture and post-dramatic theatre; and expanded creative perspectives through discussions with mentors on how to convey messages more effectively and refine artistic approaches. Through hands-on experiences, they gained practical skills essential for professional growth, from collaborative project planning to event organisation and sharing responsibility. Several also enhanced their technical expertise in photography, animation, rendering, creative writing, and composition.

The programme opened doors to professional opportunities, with some fellows noting that it directly supported their success in applying for grants or accessing international networks.

"Thanks to UAx, I got a US grant and knew how to write the motivation letter."
(Student 3)

"I believed I was worth investing in, and that changed everything." (Student 4)

Importantly, these skills were not only theoretical but also applied in real-world contexts. Students curated exhibitions, launched performances, organised public events, and built professional portfolios. They learned how to distribute tasks within teams, communicate their stories across cultures, and respond to critique.

“We discussed profound internal concepts... the role of art, how to respond to criticism.” (Student 1)

Development of artistic identity and personal voice

As students engaged more deeply with their work, many described a transformation in how they understood their artistic identity. UAx created space for reflection, experimentation, and critical conversations on art, identity, and activism. For some, this led to exploring new thematic directions; for others, it clarified their values or reshaped how they saw their role within the arts sector.

“UAx pushed me from an art lover to someone thinking in career terms.” (Student 2)
“My whole idea of what an art career could be expanded.” (Student 4)
“This wasn’t student work. This was real, professional art.” (Student 5)

Through mentorship and exposure to international contexts, students moved beyond the isolation caused by war and disrupted institutions. They began to view their work through a new lens and situate themselves within a broader artistic conversation.

Access to professional networks and international visibility

Many students described UAx as the place where they achieved significant personal and professional ‘firsts’: their first exhibitions, residencies, international applications, and first steps towards sustainable creative careers. These moments were more than milestones—they served as proofs of concept, demonstrating that students could take ownership of their paths and succeed. Some went on to receive job offers, international grants, or invitations to collaborate. Others applied for advanced degrees with stronger portfolios and clearer visions. Several created new works—films, performances, installations—that they now regard as foundational to their emerging careers.

“I saw my work through another culture’s eyes, and it changed how I shoot.” (Student 6)
“This was my first real exhibition. I was not just preparing, I was doing.” (Student 5)

In sum, UAx functioned as more than a support system, and evolved into a platform for becoming. Students entered the programme uncertain about their future, their voice, and their worth. They left with clearer direction, strengthened identities, expanded networks, and the tools to pursue their goals with confidence.

Community and Belonging in Times of Crisis

While UAx provided students with vital financial and professional support, one of its most deeply felt impacts came from something less formal yet equally powerful: a sense of community. For students navigating war, displacement, and institutional fragmentation, the programme offered a rare space of solidarity, trust, and shared experience. It became not only a place to grow artistically but also a place to belong. Across interviews and surveys, students described how connections with peers across disciplines, cities, and institutions transformed their fellowship experience. What began as a professional opportunity often became an emotional lifeline.

“UAx gave us people. That’s what mattered most.” (Student 1)

*“We still send each other feedback and job calls—it’s a real network now.”
(Student 5)*

Importance of peer connections and cross-institutional interaction

Students consistently emphasised the value of horizontal exchange: learning from one another, sharing tools and advice, and building creative energy together. For many, this was the first time they had collaborated with peers from other Ukrainian institutions or even met fellow students outside their city or programme. The cross-institutional nature of UAx proved crucial: it sparked curiosity and created conditions for organic collaboration. Students worked with peers in other cities, experimented with different art forms, and expanded their own artistic thinking in the process.

Representative student group

The programme also gave students the opportunity to take initiative and shape their collective experience. The representative group played a central role in organising events, voicing student needs, and amplifying the cohort’s perspectives. Their involvement exemplified student leadership, demonstrating how fellows could influence both the spirit and the structure of UAx.

Value of student symposiums, group meetings, and digital spaces

While formal components such as final symposiums and group meetings were valuable, it was often the informal spaces that left the deepest mark. Evenings spent by the river together, shared meals, or simply unwinding after intensive sessions became moments of genuine connection and healing for the two cohorts of fellows.



“The most important thing was the people—evenings by the river, not just workshops.” (Student 3)

“The best part of the symposium? Pizza and sunset by the river.” (Student 3)

“The best part wasn’t a workshop, it was pizza and the river and talking till 3 a.m.” (Student 1)

These unscripted encounters—late-night conversations, spontaneous collaborations, laughter over food—became the highlight for the student community. They formed an emotional infrastructure that helped students feel grounded and less alone during an otherwise isolating time.

Long-term friendships and collaborations

Even after the programme ended, the connections formed through UAx continue. Many students spoke of ongoing collaborations, friendships, and support systems that extended well beyond the fellowship’s formal timeline (one year). From continued feedback exchanges to co-hosted events, the community became self-sustaining. This kind of peer support proved especially vital in times of crisis, when institutional support was often limited or inconsistent. The relationships students built were more than just social, becoming professional, creative, and emotional ecosystems that helped them navigate the instability of the wider world.

Experiences of shared identity, solidarity, and support during crisis

At its core, UAx offered students the experience of being seen and heard by one another. In a context where many felt invisible—displaced from their institutions, cut off from international opportunities, or uncertain whether their artistic voices still mattered—the programme created a space where visibility, recognition, and trust were shared values. For some, it was the first time they encountered peers who truly understood their situation, not just as artists, but as Ukrainians working and creating during wartime. That mutual recognition sparked a sense of belonging: of being part of something larger than themselves, yet profoundly personal.

Student Support and Communication

Experience of contact with the UAx team

While financial aid and mentorship formed the core of the UAx Fellowship, students consistently highlighted another, equally vital pillar of its success: the human-centred communication and support provided by the UAx team. In a time of uncertainty and institutional gaps, this steady presence helped students navigate the fellowship as well as their wider academic and artistic lives. Across interviews and surveys, students described the team as responsive, thoughtful, and deeply empathetic. Whether facing scheduling confusion or emotional overwhelm, they knew they could reach out and receive a kind, constructive response, often within hours: *“I always got a response. I even wrote about things that weren’t their responsibility” (Student 4).*

Support channels and accessibility

The main communication channels were Telegram and email, which students praised as convenient and effective. These channels allowed participants to raise questions, share concerns, or resolve logistical issues at any time. Regular group updates, announcements, and direct replies helped sustain a sense of connection between organisers and fellows, even across multiple countries and time zones. Beyond the functional, students valued the informal and human tone adopted by the UAx team. Especially during high-stress moments, the team's calm and approachable style made a real difference: *"I really liked that there was no distance between us and the contact persons, so they weren't just distant people, but a really nice and comfortable community"* (Student 4).

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Suggestions for improvement

While most students expressed high satisfaction with the UAx team's communication, they also offered thoughtful suggestions for strengthening support in future cycles:

- Proactive updates: Regular reminders about programme milestones and opportunities would help students manage their time more effectively and reduce last-minute stress.
- Greater visibility of the team: Clearer introductions to team members at the programme's outset, including guidance on who to contact for specific issues, would make support channels more accessible.
- Language-sensitive communication: Although many updates were bilingual, students suggested closer attention to language parity between Ukrainian and English, particularly in formal announcements or critical instructions.

Ultimately, UAx's communication was more than efficient—it was relational, responsive, and values-driven. Students felt they were engaging with people who genuinely cared not just about outcomes, but about their experience, growth, and well-being. In a fragmented and stressful environment, this human presence made a lasting difference: *"Even when I was confused or late, they were kind. That helped more than they probably know"* (Student 4).

The consistency and compassion embedded in UAx's communication practices reinforced the programme's broader mission: to support students both as artists and as people navigating extraordinary circumstances.

Student Reflections and Recommendations

As the UAx Fellowship concluded, students looked back with gratitude as well as forward with vision. Their recommendations were not framed as complaints, but as constructive ideas rooted in care and a desire to help UAx evolve while remaining true to its core values of trust, flexibility, and human connection.

Mentorship

One of the most common themes concerned mentorship. Students suggested:

- Ensuring discipline-specific, one-on-one mentorship for all participants
- Providing a clear framework for communication, including agreements regarding frequency of meetings
- Aligning mentors more closely with students' creative goals or technical focus
- Offering additional support and guidance for mentors to strengthen engagement

Community continuation

Another strong theme was the desire for the UAx community to outlive the fellowship cycle. Students described the connections they made as rare and invaluable, both emotionally and professionally, and wanted to preserve and build on them.

"We've built something real—don't let it disappear." (Student 1)

"It would be amazing to meet again in five years and share where we've ended up." (Student 5)

Suggestions included:

- Maintaining alumni chats or digital platforms for sharing opportunities, feedback, and support
- Organising regular alumni gatherings, online or in person
- Creating an ongoing network for co-creation, not just memory

Visibility and opportunities

Students also emphasised the importance of amplifying the visibility of the programme and their work. They recognised the credibility UAx carried and saw untapped potential in connecting their voices to broader audiences. Proposals included:

- Partnering with festivals, residencies, and cultural institutions
- Hosting public exhibitions, screenings, or digital showcases
- Supporting international mobility through travel stipends or residency funds
- Offering guidance on grant applications, pitching, and portfolio development



Preserving the spirit of UAx

Above all, students urged the programme to safeguard the qualities that made it transformative. Flexibility, minimal bureaucracy, and trust were not just appreciated—they were foundational to its emotional and creative impact.

Suggestions included:

- Maintaining unrestricted grants
- Offering optional support (e.g., English classes or therapy) without making them mandatory
- Continuing to treat students as co-creators, not just recipients:

“Continue trusting students. Start offering more technical resources.” (Student 4)
“If this continues, it will build a new generation of confident, networked artists.”
 (Student 3)

The UAx Platform had a profound and multifaceted impact on Ukrainian students and their institutions. The unconditional bursaries enabled students to remain in their academic programmes despite the financial and logistical disruptions of war. By granting funds without restrictions, the programme affirmed students’ autonomy and dignity. As Facilitator 1 observed, this approach was unconventional but ultimately vital: *“We need to trust our students.”*

Equally significant was the mentorship programme, which helped sustain both academic and emotional engagement. At a time when many students felt isolated, mentorship offered continuity, recognition, and access to an international community. Through these relationships, fellows gained emotional support, direction, and a renewed sense of belonging. As ELIA Team member 3 recalled, mentors *“helped them [students] find a way forward.”*



Mentor Experiences

This section examines why mentors chose to join the UAx Fellowship and how the experience reshaped their professional and personal outlooks. It explores mentors' motivations—ranging from solidarity with Ukraine and a belief in the transformative power of the arts, to a desire to contribute their expertise during crisis—and highlights how mentorship became an act of care, resilience, and cross-cultural dialogue. Drawing on surveys and interviews,

the section shows how mentors adapted their practices to wartime realities, fostering flexible, trust-based relationships that prioritised empathy over structure. It also reflects on the emotional weight of mentoring through trauma, the learning mentors gained about crisis education and Ukrainian artistic resilience, and their recommendations for strengthening mentorship in future cycles.

Motivation: Why Mentors Joined UAx

While much of the UAx Abakanowicz Fellowship Programme centred on students—their challenges, growth, and creative breakthroughs—its impact on mentors was no less profound. The educators, artists, and professionals who joined did so out of duty but also conviction. For them, mentoring during wartime was never just a professional role; it became a personal and political act of solidarity, care, and purpose.

Through surveys and interviews, mentors shared their motivation for joining UAx. Some already had ties to Ukraine, through institutional partnerships or previous collaborations with students. Others were new to this context but felt compelled to contribute to sustaining Ukrainian arts education in crisis. For nearly all, joining UAx was a deliberate response to the war—an effort to place their skills and knowledge in service of something urgent and meaningful.

“When the war started, we were already a community. Mentoring was a natural next step.” (Mentor 1)

“This was one small thing I could do to help, through what I know best: teaching.” (Mentor 2)



For many, mentoring within UAx was a way to embody core their values: education builds connections across borders, creativity is a form of resistance, and artists in crisis deserve recognition and support. Some were drawn by the resilience the arts can nurture. They saw UAx not just as a chance to guide individual students, but as part of a larger movement affirming the role of culture, even in times of destruction and displacement.

“Mentorship, for me, is about mutual growth. And this was a rare chance to do that in a time of need.” (Mentor 1)

“I love to teach... every time I talk about music, I feel like I’m helping other musicians, and it helps me connect more with the music.” (Mentor 2)

Mentors did not speak of UAx as a project to which they contributed. They spoke of it as a moment of shared responsibility, a chance to give back and a space where their own practice could be reinvigorated through contact with young, courageous artists.

Mentors’ motivations were often deeply personal. For some, the decision was shaped by past experiences; for others, by a belief in horizontal, relationship-based education. These were not transactional arrangements, but human-to-human connections grounded in trust, curiosity, and shared investment.

Some mentors were invited to participate through their institutions and Sister School networks, yet most emphasised that personal values, not institutional mandates, drove their decision to participate.

At the same time, many found that UAx opened doors beyond individual relationships, fostering new cross-border dialogues among peers and institutions and situating mentorship within a wider cultural endeavour.

Mentorship in Crisis: Adaptive, Relational, Real

Mentors entered the programme with diverse practices, which proved a strength rather than a limitation. With no rigid format imposed, each developed their own system of support. UAx mentorships took many forms, from technical guidance, career advice, and creative coaching to emotional support:

- Technical guidance – developing editing skills, refining portfolios, troubleshooting creative blocks
- Career advice – navigating international grants, funding strategies, or professional pathways
- Emotional coaching – validating experiences and offering encouragement in moments of stress or self-doubt
- Creative dialogue – exploring identity, aesthetics, activism, and the meaning of making art in crisis

Mentorship became a deeply relational process. Some mentors worked with highly engaged students who shared their work between meetings and launched cross-border projects. Others navigated silence or irregular contact, particularly when students were affected by trauma or institutional overload.

"I'm not their professor. I'm a mirror. My job is to listen and reflect." (Mentor 1)
"Some just needed someone to say: yes, you can do this." (Mentor 3)

Across styles, mentors agreed the experience created real learning moments, for students as well as for themselves: *"It made me retool how I look at mentoring... new insights into working with students."* (Mentor 2) The most profound dimension of UAx mentorship was its horizontal nature: a co-creative exchange where the roles of teacher, peer, and student intentionally blurred.

Students brought lived experience, artistic experimentation, and resilience; mentors offered structure, perspective, and trust. Together, they navigated a space where artistic identity, mental health, and professional ambition were all on the table: *"We didn't just talk about music or theatre. We talked about fear, purpose, and what kind of artists we want to be now"* (Mentor 3).

A common thread was flexibility over format. In wartime conditions, strict schedules or deliverables could have stifled growth or caused more anxiety. Instead, mentors adapted carefully week by week, letting students lead when they were ready, offering structure when needed, and holding space when nothing else was possible. Mentors described tailoring their approach depending on whether a student was preparing a final project, rebuilding a practice from scratch, or simply looking for connection after months of institutional silence: *"It's not like class 1, class 2... I tried to be elastic and understand week to week what motivates them"* (Mentor 1).

Despite differences in style, mentors consistently described UAx as a deeply human experience. In a world of disruption, they provided consistency, attention, and care—and in return received perspective, energy, and inspiration. Some relationships lasted only months; others extended beyond the programme. All were shaped by mutual respect and the kind of learning that cannot be taught through curriculum alone.

Moments of Transformation

As the UAx Fellowship unfolded, mentors highlighted tangible artistic and personal growth in their mentees, including:

Participation in exhibitions, recordings, performances. A clear indicator of growth was students' increasing engagement with public artistic platforms. Many developed and presented new work during the fellowship, curating exhibitions, creating digital storytelling projects, or strengthening technical skills. Mentors took pride in helping students move from concept to execution, noting their combined artistic and logistical development: *"They found their voice. And their courage."* (Mentor 2)

Increases in confidence. For many mentors, the most powerful transformation they saw in fellows was internal. Students who began the programme unsure of their value ended it speaking about their practice with confidence, clarity, and ambition—changes that echoed students' own reflections:

“Seeing their growth was the most rewarding, not just in skill, but in self-trust. One of them came out completely transformed, and that made it all worth it.”

(Mentor 1)

“Watching the mentees grow... showing project development is my favourite part.”

(Mentor 3)

Expanded cultural horizons. Exposure to cross-cultural dialogue and interdisciplinary approaches encouraged mentees to challenge assumptions, experiment more boldly, and rethink what their art could communicate.

Artistic and professional identity. Several mentors reported how mentees began to shift their self-conception from students to professionals with agency and distinct artistic voices.

Improved technical, compositional, and improvisational skills. Beyond public presentation, students made advances in photography, sound editing, creative writing, animation, and improvisation. Some embraced new formats, while others refined traditional practices through structured guidance and feedback.

Access to international networks and opportunities. Mentors valued seeing students plan their futures with greater intentionality: applying to master's programmes, joining residencies, or launching collective initiatives with renewed confidence.

Mentoring through Trauma: Emotional Weight and Other Challenges

While the UAx mentorship programme offered mentors rich opportunities for connection and growth, it also revealed significant challenges, both logistical and emotional. In the context of war and systemic instability, mentorship could not be neatly separated from the wider realities students were living through: *“It gave me more insight into a more hands-on experience with the situation in Ukraine... it also gives you a different perspective.”* (Mentor 1)

Uneven engagement or communication from mentees

Some mentors struggled to maintain consistent communication, with mentees becoming unresponsive or waiting for mentors to initiate discussions: *“Each student had a different level of engagement... but we did the best we could.”* (Mentor 2)

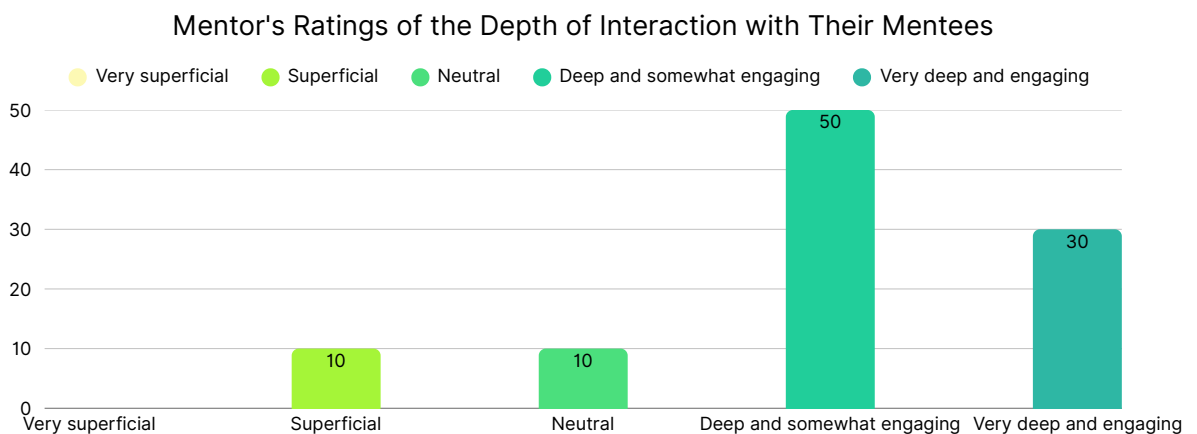
Language and scheduling issues, platform limitations. Language barriers, particularly during early sessions, created friction in communication. Time zone differences, limited internet access, and scheduling conflicts with students' academic responsibilities further complicated the flow of interaction.

Lack of clarity around goals. In some pairings, expectations were never defined, leaving mentors uncertain about how best to support their students: *“Some students were like mirrors, open and curious. Others stayed distant, and that was harder.”* (Mentor 3)

Emotional toll. Mentors acknowledged the emotional toll of mentoring students living with bombardment or trauma. It wasn't just about teaching techniques or reviewing portfolios; it meant engaging deeply with students who were experiencing trauma, instability, and emotional strain. Mentors gained a much more immediate, visceral understanding of what it means to live through war: *"Honestly, I can still literally envision the words he was talking about. That won't leave my mind, probably ever."* (Mentor 3) This experience, as reported, expanded their capacity for empathy, gave them insight into the realities faced by their mentees, and altered how they perceived their roles, not just as educators, but as supporters and listeners.

At times, mentors faced moments of acute emotional strain. Mentors had to respond to situations far beyond academic concerns, dealing with students who were grieving, struggling with displacement, or navigating day-to-day life in active war zones. These moments were intense, emotionally taxing, and unforgettable, creating deep bonds and/or exposing mentors to the psychological costs of war on young people.

Survey results echo these reflections: 50% described their interactions as 'deep and somewhat engaging', while 30% of mentors described their relationships as 'very deep and engaging'. About 20% reported their relationships as 'neutral' or 'superficial'.



Source: Mentors Survey, 2025.

These findings underline the need for stronger onboarding of mentors and mentees, clearer structures, and dedicated emotional support for mentors. These findings have already informed the next cohort (2025) of participants, with mentorship training integrated as an important onboarding step.

What Mentors Learned and Gained

While the UAx Fellowship was designed primarily to support students, mentors consistently described the experience as profoundly meaningful for themselves. They reflected on how the experience reshaped their teaching, deepened their understanding of mentorship, and redefined what it means to guide others in times of crisis.

New insights into teaching. Supporting students navigating displacement and trauma forced mentors to abandon rigid expectations of mentorship and instead lead with presence, humility, and adaptability. The unpredictability of wartime education reminded mentors that effective teaching is about responsiveness, not control. This approach was both necessary and transformative. Several mentors stated that the experience shifted their methods permanently, encouraging them to build more space for empathy, experimentation, and pause within their own institutional contexts.

“It questioned my own mindset as a teacher, and that’s so valuable.” (Mentor 1)
“It changed how I teach. It made me softer, but also sharper.” (Mentor 1)

Gaining new insights into Ukrainian arts and crisis education. Prior to UAx, many had limited knowledge of Ukraine. Working closely with students and institutions under pressure gave mentors a direct perspective on sustaining artistic practice during war and fostered deep respect for Ukrainian cultural systems, pedagogical traditions, and contemporary debates.

Expanded networks across Europe. Mentors valued the programme for connecting them with colleagues across institutions, sharing strategies, and forming relationships that may lead to future collaborations.

Mentorship as care work. The fellowship highlighted the relational core of mentorship—not just critique or instruction, but listening, mirroring, and trust. Many reframed mentoring as horizontal care work grounded in mutual respect.

Mentors described UAx as a powerful reminder that effective teaching is about responsiveness, not control. The unpredictable conditions of wartime education required them to let go of preset agendas, meet students where they were, and allow sessions to unfold around need rather than plan.

Recommendations and Reflections for the Future

Reflecting on their experience, mentors offered thoughtful suggestions to strengthen the mentorship process:

Clearer onboarding and role clarification. Mentors asked for better guidance from the outset: who their mentees were, what kind of support was expected, and how much structure would be useful without being restrictive.

Light-touch structure for setting goals. They suggested a flexible framework to help mentors and mentees clarify objectives and track progress.

Optional final project or milestone (e.g., performance, exhibition). Several suggested including an optional final milestone, such as a small exhibition, recording, or performance, to give students something to work towards: *“Add a final project—concert, recording, research—that helps students develop their careers.”* (Mentor 1)

Other practical suggestions included:

- Support for developing mentees' English, especially early in the process
- More in-person or group components, when feasible, to deepen connection
- Shorter mentorship cycles for a more manageable commitment

"Even a one-month mentorship can be impactful. It's the intention and energy that matter." (Mentor 2)

At the same time, mentors emphasised what should remain central:

- Respect for mentor and mentees' autonomy and flexibility
- Prioritising trust and relationship over output
- Encouraging transdisciplinary and international pairings

These elements, they felt, created the conditions for genuine human connection and transformative mentorship. UAx successfully fostered an environment where listening, care, and trust were central, and creativity could unfold without institutional pressure.

Aspects to reconsider:

- Mentoring cycles were sometimes longer than necessary
- Assuming students were equally prepared or available, despite very different circumstances
- Assigning too many mentees per mentor, which diluted attention and impact

Mentors acknowledged the emotional and logistical demands of the programme and offered these insights to ensure future cohorts benefit fully. In sum, they envisioned a UAx that remains rooted in trust, flexibility, and relational depth, but supported by clearer structures, better resources, and more opportunities for reflection and connection.



Experiences of Ukrainian Institutions



The UAx Platform has had a profound impact on Ukrainian higher arts institutions during one of the most turbulent periods in their history. At a time when war threatened to isolate schools from international networks, UAx provided emergency solidarity along with an entry point into long-term collaboration, reform, and resilience.

Institutions reported that the platform enabled them to remain connected to the European academic and cultural space through ELIA membership, Sister School partnerships, and regular exchanges. Survey and interview data show that these forms of engagement improved morale, strengthened resilience, and prompted internal changes in leadership, pedagogy, and strategy. What began as a wartime response quickly evolved into a transformative force for institutional renewal.

From Emergency to Strategy: Why Ukrainian Institutions Joined

Ukrainian institutions joined UAx at a moment of immense instability, disruption, and uncertainty caused by the war. Their initial motivations were largely pragmatic: to access emergency support, secure bursaries for students, and maintain links to the outside world at a time of forced isolation. In the words of one representative:

"We came in looking for support; we left thinking about transformation."
(UA Representative 1)

"It began as survival. It became renewal." (UA Representative 1)

Institutions entered UAx with varying expectations and different levels of preparedness of what's to come. Some were already familiar with ELIA or had prior international partnerships, while others described joining as a leap of faith, driven by the open call, wartime isolation, or the search for meaningful connection.

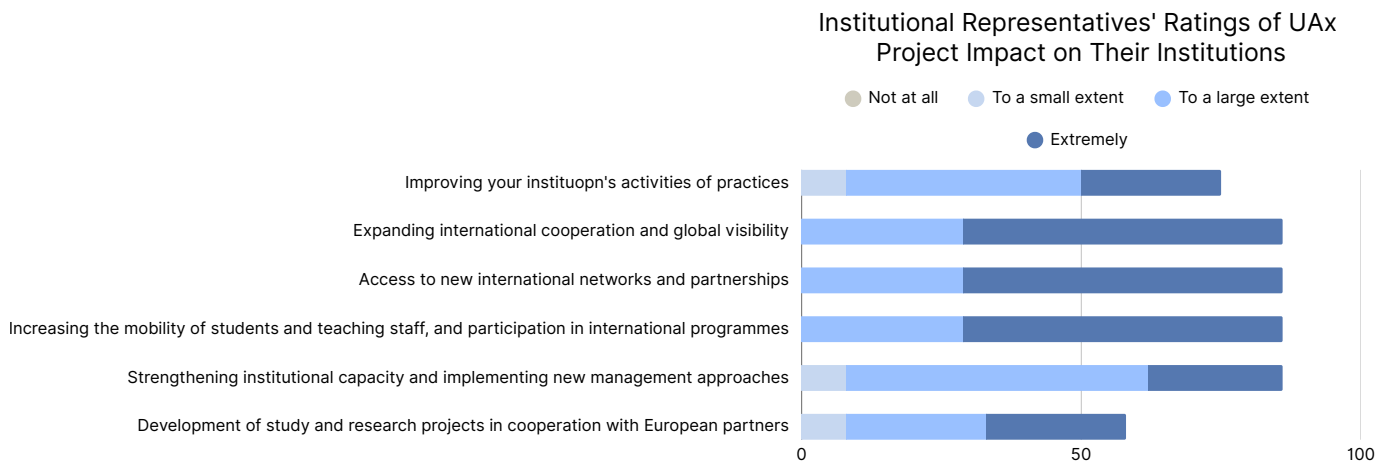
“At first, we didn’t really know what to expect. It was more of a feeling—a chance we wanted to take.” (UA Representative 3)

“I saw the application on Facebook and thought, wow, that’s really interesting... We were selected, and we were pleasantly surprised.” (UA Representative 2)

What UAx offered went far beyond what they initially expected: technical or financial aid. Regular meetings, international visibility, and ELIA membership gave institutions a sense of being seen and included in the European academic and cultural space at a time of profound isolation. This connection brought tangible results: access to new methodologies, funding streams, and collaborative structures. It became a bridge to partnerships and innovation, and a space where Ukrainian staff could both learn from others and contribute.

“UAx gave us access, and dignity.” (UA Representative 1)

Survey results confirm this shift in motivation. While institutions joined for survival, 91% later reported that UAx significantly improved or transformed their international partnerships, and 75% said it expanded their access to modern methodologies and networks. What began as emergency relief evolved into a strategic opportunity to rethink internationalisation, strengthen partnerships, and imagine new futures for Ukrainian arts education.



Source: Ukrainian Institutional Representatives Survey, 2025.

Through UAx, institutions came to see themselves not merely as recipients of aid but as active partners in European cultural and academic discourse. This shift—from reactive to proactive engagement—marks one of the platform’s most significant institutional impacts, signalling that transformation is possible, even in wartime, not by returning to the past but by rethinking what could be.

The Power of Sister School Partnerships

The Sister School model emerged as one of the most transformative elements of UAx. These partnerships served as living laboratories of internationalisation and ethical international collaboration, fostering mutual learning, student and staff mobility, collaborative teaching formats, and new strategic alignments.

Survey data reinforces this: 83% of UA schools rated their partnerships as effective or very effective, and over half reported co-developing new projects, describing them as ‘equal, friendly, trust-based’.

“It wasn’t a formal exchange. It was a relationship. A living one.” (UA Representative 2)
“They believed in our ideas, even when the money didn’t come through—and we did it anyway.” (UA Representative 1)

The model became a key driver of transformation. Interviews and surveys of the Ukrainian and international partner institutions, mentors, and students revealed a nuanced picture of the impact: strengthening international collaborations, driving institutional reforms, and deepening institutional ties.

Institutions reported the following tangible outcomes:

Increased mobility and international exchange. Sister School partnerships provided students and staff with access to new practices abroad, while digital exchanges ensured a continuous flow of ideas and practices. Erasmus+ agreements were also more active and allowed Ukrainian students to study at partner universities.

Institutional reforms. Exposure to European models accelerated institutional reforms, including credit recognition and more student-centred scheduling. Respondents also noted that UAx inspired new research and artistic collaborations, and increased openness to European standards and funding approaches.

“I didn’t think a jazz mentor from another country could influence our exams. But they did.” (UA Representative 3)
“Thanks to our Sister School, we changed our mobility regulations and curriculum structure.” (UA Representative 1)

Long-term collaboration. Institutions highlighted the depth of these relationships, which spanned grant applications, co-teaching, workshops, shared exhibitions, and international mobility.

“So, we are trying to do a project with a chamber orchestra for next autumn. We have this hope that they [international partner school] will be able to come through if there is any option after the war, and they want to come to us...we have dates set for when they can come.” (UA Representative 3)

Internal collaborations between Ukrainian institutions. Increased collaborations between Ukrainian institutions were also reported. UAx allowed for a much deeper collaborations between both students and staff of these institutions to engage in cross-disciplinary projects and exchange ideas.

“It was one of our alumni who was shortlisted for the Eurovision Song Contest Final. And some of them were in her band on the backing track, but the [other Ukrainian school] made the costumes for them. And so, it was as if we were [doing it] together.” (UA Representative 3)

Institutional Learning and Internal Change

Beyond partnership, UAx prompted deeper internal reflections. Institutions reported changes in how they engaged their own students, developed capacity, and approached internationalisation. Ukrainian institutions reported incorporating UAx into more than just reports and funding applications, bringing it into how they narrate their institutional identity and future vision as well.

*“We now cite UAx in our internationalisation strategy and annual reports.”
(UA Representative 2)*

Participation in UAx prompted changes in how institutions:

- Develop and manage international partnerships and grants
- Structure professional development for faculty and staff
- Encourage peer-to-peer learning across schools and departments
- Approach mentorship, moving from top-down supervision to more relational, horizontal models

Participation in UAx fostered institutional learning across multiple levels:

Administrative knowledge. Staff who engaged with UAx directly brought back new approaches, tools, and mindsets, often influencing the broader academic environment at their institutions.

Capacity-building. UAx supported institutions with providing professional development opportunities to their staff.

Curriculum reform inspired by exposure to European approaches. European teaching models, particularly around interdisciplinarity, co-creation, and practice-based research, inspired some institutions to rethink their course offerings, assessment methods, and structures of artistic inquiry.

Experimentation with learning formats. Some schools began experimenting with hybrid formats, blending online and in-person teaching. Besides supporting learning during the crisis, these experiments opened new possibilities for transnational artistic dialogue that will continue post-war.

Reciprocity and self-worth. Perhaps most importantly, UAx helped institutions reframe their role within the broader European education and culture ecosystem. What began as a search for emergency aid evolved into a confident assertion of presence, value, and contribution. Many schools now view themselves as co-creators of international dialogue rather than passive recipients of aid or knowledge.

By prompting reflection, dialogue, and experimentation, UAx encouraged schools to invest in strategic thinking, even in the face of ongoing uncertainty. It sparked a long-term shift from surviving the war to reimagining education.



Networks and Belonging: UAX as a Community of Practice

For institutions long cut off from European networks, UAX provided more than new contacts—it offered recognition and belonging. War-related isolation had made meaningful participation in international networks almost impossible. UAX shifted this dynamic, affirming Ukrainian schools' place within a shared academic and cultural space. By facilitating regular exchanges, ELIA membership, and access to advocacy and policy arenas, the platform helped move institutions from the periphery to the centre of conversation, where they felt seen, respected, and included in the broader European arts education ecosystem.

“Being part of ELIA changed our position, from passive recipients to equal partners.”
(UA Representative 1)

“Now I can write to a university in Spain and know they’ll answer. Not because we’re Ukrainian, but because we’re colleagues.” (UA Representative 3)

For many participating schools, ELIA membership represented a milestone, a visible marker of legitimacy that unlocked opportunities previously out of reach. It enabled institutions to attend UAX Days and international conferences, join debates on artistic research and higher education policy, and contribute to shaping European arts education from within. This visibility reframed how Ukrainian institutions were perceived abroad and, equally importantly, how they viewed themselves. No longer passive recipients of aid, they emerged as active participants and contributors, bringing knowledge, insight, and resilience to the European stage.

“We used to feel peripheral. Now we feel connected.” (UA Representative 2)

Beyond formal structures, the UAX community functioned as a kind of emotional and strategic infrastructure for institutions operating in crisis. Regular monthly meetings, peer updates, and cross-institutional exchanges created a rhythm of connection enabling schools to share solutions, identify needs, and learn together. Even in the most difficult moments, such as when campuses were shelled or power was lost, UAX offered quick-response solidarity that often arrived faster than national or media attention:

“When a missile hit our campus, UAX was there before the press.” (UA Representative 2)

Informal connections played an equally important role. The platform fostered cross-departmental and cross-border relationships that built trust and mutual support. These

networks were not only institutional but also deeply human, grounded in shared values, vulnerability, and co-creation.

Survey responses from Ukrainian institutions underscore this impact:

- 91.7% of institutions felt ‘well-informed’ by the UAx team
- 83.3% described UAx monthly meetings as ‘very effective’ in building connection
- Multiple schools highlighted UAx’s role in providing emergency solidarity, strategic updates, and advocacy opportunities

Together, these findings suggest that UAx succeeded in creating a platform that was responsive, relational, and rooted in mutual care. Perhaps its greatest legacy lies in the shift it enabled: Ukrainian institutions began to see themselves not as passive recipients but as full partners; not as disconnected but as connected; not merely surviving but actively strategising.

Supporting Students, Supporting Staff

Among programme elements, according to the Ukrainian institutional representatives, the most effective were student mentorship and direct financial support to students via bursaries. This had an influence on student retention, performance, and visibility, with mentorship especially valued for providing access to high-level expertise and shaping students’ professional aspirations.

Ukrainian institutions reported that the student support programme transformed their students. As they developed new competencies and returned with fresh ideas, faculty and administrators began to reconsider their own roles, methods, and ambitions. Students’ growth in terms of confidence, visibility, and leadership challenged traditional institutional mindsets. Those who once struggled to imagine their place on the global stage became active agents of change, sparking institutional introspection and adaptation.

“Our students came back different, and that pushed us to change, too.”
(UA Representative 3)

Institutions reported that returning students demonstrated new levels of autonomy, cross-cultural fluency, and strategic initiative. These students-led shifts prompted institutions to:

- Re-evaluate their pedagogical approaches
- Support greater student initiative and leadership
- Create more space for peer-to-peer learning and student-led projects

In some cases, students’ success abroad generated the incentive and inspiration to accelerate their own internationalisation efforts at home.

As institutions supported students through the mentorship component of UAx, they also began reflecting on their own mentorship cultures. Exposure to international mentors—whose approaches were often more flexible and horizontal—prompted many Ukrainian faculty to reconsider how they guide, assess, and inspire students.

Several institutions even called for extending mentorship beyond students to include the professional development of educators themselves.

“Why not mentor the mentors?” (UA Representative 2)

One of the most profound outcomes of UAx was the shift in institutional attitudes towards internationalisation. Previously, this was often seen as bureaucratic or policy driven. Through UAx, it became a lived practice, grounded in human relationships, mutual support, and creative co-production. As a result, some institutions began to:

- Reframe internationalisation as a student-centred process
- Embed internationalisation into strategic planning and annual reporting
- Treat student mobility and visibility as indicators of institutional success

The most powerful transformation, however, was cultural. Students returning from UAx experiences shared their knowledge, tools, and perspectives with peers and staff. These exchanges reshaped faculty mindsets and created momentum for change. Institutions reported that this process:

- Introduced new artistic methods and conceptual frameworks
- Encouraged peers to apply for grants and international opportunities
- Helped shape more collaborative and inclusive learning environments

In this way, UAx became more than a support system for students—it served as a catalyst for staff development and institutional learning.

Uneven Terrain: Gaps and Structural Challenges

Despite overwhelmingly positive feedback, institutions were candid about the frictions and structural barriers they faced. These challenges did not diminish the value of UAx and instead highlighted the uneven terrain on which Ukrainian schools are currently operating. From resource gaps to bureaucratic mismatches, several issues emerged as obstacles to fully realising the platform’s long-term potential.

Institutions reported varied levels of engagement and capacity, both within their own teams and across the wider UAx network. Some schools were able to activate cross-institutional collaboration quickly, while others struggled with limited staff, competing priorities, or uncertainty about how best to participate. This unevenness occasionally created imbalances in co-creation and partnership dynamics.

A recurring theme was the heavy reliance on individual initiative. Many of the successes—both within and between institutions—were driven by the energy and passion of particular staff members.



While invaluable, this reliance also revealed a vulnerability: without formal structures or sustained funding, the platform risked depending too much on informal relationships and personal commitment alone.

“Collaboration runs on passion. But passion alone is not enough.” (UA Representative 3)

Ukrainian institutions also pointed to persistent challenges, particularly language barriers and administrative mismatches between Ukrainian and EU systems. Applying for international funding, navigating grant portals, or translating institutional documentation often required additional time, support, or external translation services.

Another major constraint was the lack of funding for in-person mobility and joint project implementation. While online collaboration made much of UAx possible during the crisis, it could not fully replace the impact of physical exchange, such as attending performances together, co-producing exhibitions, or simply sharing time and space.

“We have ideas. But no budget. Online helps, but we need to touch the real stage.” (UA Representative 3)

Visa complications, logistical hurdles, and limited travel support continued to constrain the potential for deeper exchange. Institutions noted that while UAx opened many conceptual doors, structural and financial gaps often made it difficult to step through them in practice.

Differences in institutional readiness and resources also created coordination challenges. Some schools could act quickly on new ideas and partnerships, while others required more support in terms of time or capacity. These disparities raised broader concerns about the sustainability of cross-border initiatives, especially for institutions still recovering from systemic shocks. Respondents stressed the need for dedicated funding for students as well as for staff, infrastructure, and institutional development.

Taken together, these reflections present a picture of a high-impact, high-potential platform operating under precarious conditions. UAx thrived because participants invested exceptional care, energy, and commitment. But to scale and sustain its success, the structural barriers identified must be addressed. Priorities include:

- Investing in mobility and in-person collaboration
- Supporting language and admin translation capacity
- Providing long-term infrastructure support to institutions
- Reducing dependence on individual initiative by building systemic scaffolding

What Comes Next: Institutional Visions for the Future

As the UAx Fellowship Platform matures, Ukrainian institutions are reflecting on its achievements and actively envisioning what it could become. Across interviews and survey responses, a clear message emerged: the need for sustained, strategic, and structured collaboration. Institutions stressed that UAx should not remain a one-time response to crisis, but serve as the foundation for a long-term platform to rebuild, reimagine, and strengthen

Ukrainian arts education during and after the war.

“With this platform, we have the roots of a new model.” (UA Representative 1)

Institutions expressed strong support for continuing and formalising many elements introduced during UAx, particularly:

- Sustained Sister School partnerships
- Annual UAx/ELIA institutional gatherings
- Mobility and mentorship opportunities for staff
- Joint research or artistic projects across institutions
- Capacity-building tools (e.g., fundraising, advocacy, artistic research)

“Let’s not lose the habit of seeing each other.” (UA Representative 2)

Institutions highlighted the value of the regularity, transparency, and trust fostered by UAx and want to preserve those dynamics in future collaborations. There was a shared interest in shifting from short-term projects to long-term infrastructure, with greater emphasis on staff development and inter-institutional learning. A recurring theme was the desire to expand UAx’s focus beyond student support to include institutional transformation and professional growth for educators.

“Why not mentor the mentors?” (UA Representative 2)

There was also recognition that staff mobility and capacity-building are vital to sustaining the progress students have made. If students return with new ideas and international exposure, staff must have access to the same opportunities to keep pace and cultivate a supportive environment.

Institutions no longer see UAx as simply a wartime intervention. Many view it as a blueprint for post-war recovery and transformation, envisioning a multi-tiered platform that supports:

- Curriculum innovation
- International policy dialogue
- Collaborative artistic production
- Institutional resilience and reform

“Give us structure, give us space, and we’ll build a new generation of internationalised institutions.” (UA Representative 1)



Ultimately, what institutions are asking for is not radical reinvention but continuity, expansion, and trust. The values that defined UAx—flexibility, solidarity and co-creation—remain at the heart of their vision for what comes next. But to move forward, they need structure, investment, and time. What began as a crisis platform has become something much more: a community, a strategy and a long-term asset for Ukrainian higher arts education. *“This is not just a project. It’s a platform for the future.”* (UA Representative 2)



Experiences of International Art Institutions



For international institutions, joining UAx was not simply about professional development or network expansion—it was an act of solidarity. Their participation was rooted in ethics, shared values, and a belief in the transformative power of the arts. From the outset, partner schools framed their involvement as a deliberate response to war and a way to contribute meaningfully with the resources they already had: knowledge, mentorship, infrastructure, and creative community.

"We were already thinking: How can we help? UAx gave us the structure to act." (International Representative 1)

Engaging in Solidarity: Why International Partners Joined

Partners were motivated by a blend of long-standing commitments to internationalisation, freedom of expression, and academic and cultural diplomacy. They saw UAx as a natural extension of those principles. Quite a few entered the programme with existing links to Ukrainian institutions or as ELIA members already engaged in strengthening cross-border collaboration. For some, UAx was also an opportunity to engage more meaningfully in the topic of art as a form of resistance; to support young artists in crisis and to reaffirm the role of cultural education in moments of crisis.

Thus, participation in UAx was widely described as an opportunity to act on institutional values. The platform offered more than symbolic solidarity; it provided a practical framework for meaningful engagement. Institutions emphasised that their motivation was not about charity but about mutual learning and reciprocity. Ukrainian students and the schools' representatives brought urgency, resilience, and new perspectives. International mentors contributed access, structure, and networks. Together, they were building communities of care and creativity, grounded in shared purpose.

Survey data confirms this strong alignment, and 87.5% of international partners reported being very satisfied with their participation. The main benefits cited were:

- The opportunity to support students in a time of need
- The chance to build or strengthen international relationships
- The ability to engage with cultural diplomacy through education

In sum, UAx provided international partners with a clear, actionable channel to put their values into practice. It gave them a role in sustaining Ukraine's cultural infrastructure during crisis, while also deepening their own capacity for relational, responsive education and international collaboration. Rather than top-down assistance, UAx fostered partnerships based on equity, care, and shared growth. For many international schools, it served as a reminder of what higher arts education can and must be: collaborative, politically aware, and committed to building creative futures, even in times of crisis.

"UAx wasn't just support. It was a declaration: we're in this together."
(International Representative 2)

Value of Sister School Partnerships

UAx created opportunities for international Sister Schools to form meaningful—and often unexpected—partnerships with Ukrainian institutions. These collaborations went far beyond simple exchanges, leading to invitations to conferences, joint exhibitions, and new interdisciplinary teaching formats. For many, this network-building enriched their international portfolios and connected them to schools and individuals they might never otherwise have met. The platform served as a bridge across cultural and disciplinary boundaries, fostering a greater sense of European academic cohesion and embedding Ukraine firmly within it.

"We've made new connections both in Ukraine and with the rest of the participants... It's opening up new doors of collaboration and opportunities."
(International Representative 1)

“The most important outcome is that we really know all the other Sister Schools beyond our own as well, and UAx constantly keeps Ukraine in our minds.”
(International Representatives 4 and 5 [interviewed together])

Unlike short-term exchange models, the Sister School framework offered continuity and depth, creating a foundation of trust-based cooperation that extended well beyond individual projects. International partners praised it as a practical and human-centred model of internationalisation. Rather than focusing on mobility metrics or transactional agreements, these partnerships prioritised co-creation, mutual learning, and solidarity.

“This wasn’t symbolic partnership. We co-created projects, even under wartime constraints.” (International Representative 3)

Despite logistical and political challenges, these relationships generated tangible outcomes across multiple areas of institutional life:

- Deep institutional ties built on shared purpose and trust
- Artistic and pedagogical exchanges, including workshops, co-teaching, and shared projects
- Opportunities for student and staff mobility, including digital and hybrid formats
- Concrete outputs such as exhibitions, mentoring sessions, and student residencies
- Regular cross-institutional dialogue through UAx monthly meetings and peer-to-peer consultations

Even when in-person exchanges were limited, schools found ways to collaborate.

“The mentoring was beautiful. But bringing them to our campus—that’s what made it real.” (International Representatives 4 and 5 [interviewed together])

Survey data reinforces these findings. Of the international partners, 50% rated their cooperation with Ukrainian Sister Schools as ‘very effective’, while over 75% reported stronger institutional collaboration and mutual trust. These figures underscore the success of the model in generating both immediate benefits and long-term opportunities.

For many institutions, Sister School partnerships are now seen as platforms for future cooperation, with ongoing discussions around Erasmus+ agreements, joint research initiatives, and expanded mobility projects.

Mutual Impact: Learning Across Borders

UAx was conceived as a platform for mutual exchange from the start. While its primary goal was to support Ukrainian students and institutions in crisis, it also profoundly shaped the international partners who stepped forward in solidarity. Mentoring Ukrainian students went beyond fostering their artistic and academic growth—it reshaped faculty mindsets, institutional practices, and international engagement strategies.

“It’s reminded our faculty what education is really for: to support, to listen, to stand with.” (Survey response)

For many institutions, UAx became a catalyst for internal learning. Faculty developed new cultural competencies, gained experience teaching in hybrid and transnational formats, and refined mentorship approaches for students navigating crisis. These lessons extend far beyond Ukraine, offering models for higher education globally as it grapples with displacement, inequality, and social disruption. Several partners reported that UAx revealed capacities they had not fully recognised, such as faculty interest in crisis mentoring or readiness to host students from conflict-affected contexts.

“We had more faculty apply to mentor than we had slots. That told us something important.” (International Representatives 4 and 5 [interviewed together])

This demonstrated that, given the opportunity, educators are eager to move beyond transactional models of mobility and towards solidarity-driven exchange.

The impact reached beyond faculty. Students from partner institutions also engaged with Ukrainian peers through joint workshops and Sister School visits, contributing to building empathy, resilience, and intercultural understanding. These encounters created peer networks that extended across borders and disciplines.

“Our exhibition showed that this was not a digital exchange—it was real.”
(International Representative 1)

Public exhibitions, screenings, and events featuring Ukrainian mentees’ work became another visible outcome. These activities:

- Expanded the visibility of Ukrainian artists and narratives
- Brought international audiences into dialogue with wartime cultural production
- Reinforced the role of art schools as spaces of advocacy and care

“We saw resilience in action, and it changed how we teach.” — (Survey response)

These exhibitions were not symbolic gestures: they demonstrated that even remote collaboration could generate tangible cultural outcomes under the most constrained conditions.



UAX's influence also extended into institutional strategy. For some partners, the programme became a proof of concept for new forms of engagement, leading to:

- Integration of Ukraine-focused actions into internationalisation strategies
- Launch of staff-led initiatives and departmental networks for crisis response
- Inclusion of policy advocacy and cultural solidarity in academic missions

"This work made ELIA more visible and meaningful within our university."

(International Representative 2)

"It's part of our strategic plan now: support Ukraine, not just symbolically."

(International Representative 2)

Survey data reflects this:

- The majority of partners said the project increased their institution's visibility in international solidarity.
- Likewise, 75% reported that UAX deepened institutional relationships with ELIA and Ukraine.

For international partners, UAX was both mirror and catalyst. It reminded them of the ethical foundations of higher arts education and revealed new ways to enact those values. What began as an emergency response has become embedded in institutional strategies, influencing research priorities, advocacy agendas, and faculty development. UAX is viewed not just as a project, but the beginning of a new paradigm for global arts education—one that balances reciprocity, care, and systemic change.

Learning in Community: The UAX Network

Beyond mentorships and institutional partnerships, one of UAX's greatest strengths was its ability to cultivate a living community of practice. Through monthly meetings, UAX Days, and informal exchanges, the network created spaces of empathy, peer learning, and collective responsibility. For international partners, these were not just check-ins, but moments to connect deeply with the realities of Ukrainian institutions and students.

"The students' stories stayed with us long after the event." (International Representatives 4 and 5 [interviewed together])

"Sometimes the agenda was unclear - but the solidarity was always clear."
(International Representative 1)

Survey data underscores the value of these interactions: Of the respondents, 85% said monthly meetings fostered a strong sense of community, and 87.5% reported attending them regularly.

These sessions became critical touchpoints for updates, funding advice, emotional support, and peer exchange. They also ensured Ukraine remained present in institutional life, preventing the urgency of support from fading.

"Even speculative conversations helped. They reminded us of the why behind our work." (International Representative 3)

International partners consistently highlighted the following core values of participation:

- Timely updates on programme progress and student needs
- Emotional support, sharing challenges, and moments of solidarity
- Funding advice and best practices for sustaining collaborations
- Peer learning and networking opportunities with like-minded institutions

This unique combination of strategic information and emotional connection made the community a rare space where institutions could align practical actions with shared values.

While the community was praised for its warmth and openness, some partners suggested improvements:

- Adding guest experts on funding opportunities, EU collaborations, and project sustainability
- Introducing clearer meeting agendas or thematic sessions
- Encouraging co-facilitation by participants, creating more interactive and collaborative formats

These improvements, respondents felt, would build on the strong foundation of trust while maximising the knowledge-sharing potential of the network.

Not all institutions engaged equally. Most attended monthly meetings, but a smaller subset contributed regularly to dialogue or specific projects. Time zones, workloads, and capacity constraints partly explained this unevenness, pointing to the need for continued experimentation with formats to broaden participation.

Perhaps the most meaningful outcome of the network was its ability to hold space for reflection, reminding participants of the deeper purpose behind their work. In a sector often dominated by deadlines, UAx offered moments of pause, empathy, and collective vision.

“Monthly meetings were valuable to hear what others were doing and to share solutions.” (International Representative 3)

Looking forward, international partners expressed a desire to strengthen and expand the UAx network, transforming it into a sustainable, long-term platform for collaboration. Recommendations included:

- Formalising community-of-practice events such as webinars or themed dialogues
- Providing training sessions on EU funding, cross-border project design, and advocacy



Challenges Navigated

Despite overwhelmingly positive experiences, international partners also identified recurring structural and logistical barriers. These challenges did not diminish the programme's impact but highlighted the complexities of collaboration during wartime.

Funding. A lack of dedicated funding limited in-person exchanges, residencies, and campus visits. While virtual collaboration proved effective, it could not replace the depth of creative work fostered by physical presence.

"We need funding not to pay us, but to help make the collaboration feasible."
(International Representative 1)

Mobility. Travel complications also created delays and logistical barriers to mobility, especially for students and staff traveling between Ukraine and the EU. For Ukrainian male students, war-related travel restrictions made participation in international events or on-campus exchanges impossible. Partner institutions had to adapt quickly, creating hybrid or remote options, which, while successful, required significant additional coordination.

"One student couldn't cross the border because he was male. Everything was arranged, and it fell apart two days before." (International Representatives 4 and 5 [interviewed together])

Administrative mismatches. Differences in credit recognition, calendars, and institutional protocols often required improvisation and informal agreements. For some international partners, aligning their internal structures with those of Ukrainian schools required creative problem-solving and informal agreements. Some partner schools noted that more structured guidance for mentors and institutions could have improved the experience. In particular, clearer expectations for logistics, communication, and mentorship goals would have helped standardise the approach while preserving the flexibility that made UAx unique.

War-related disruptions. These challenges were also a reflection of the unprecedented circumstances in which UAx operated. War-related disruptions, from power outages to emotional strain, required all institutions to exercise extraordinary patience, adaptability, and creativity. Many international partners reflected that navigating these obstacles only strengthened their commitment to collaboration. To address these challenges, institutions recommended:

- Dedicated funding mechanisms for international mobility and staff engagement
- Streamlined visa and travel support for Ukrainian students
- Shared guidelines and toolkits for mentorship onboarding and logistics
- Enhanced administrative support for cross-border academic recognition

By tackling these systemic issues, future iterations of UAx could move beyond ad hoc problem-solving to build more resilient and scalable models of international collaboration.

What Comes Next: Sustainability and Expansion

For international partners, UAx is more than a temporary initiative; it is seen as a long-term investment in European educational solidarity. As the platform matures, non-Ukrainian institutions are calling for expansion as well as strategic deepening: strengthening the partnerships, pathways, and structures that will ensure lasting impact.

“You’ve built the network. Now build the depth.” (International Representative 2)

The early phases of UAx succeeded in rapidly building a committed network, but partners now stress the need to consolidate that foundation. Trust built through mentoring, Sister School collaborations, and community meetings should be reinforced through concrete structures, shared tools, and post-mentorship opportunities.

Key recommendations include:

- Funding for EU partner coordination, not just Ukrainian-side support
- Post-mentorship pathways such as exhibitions, alumni networks, and graduate opportunities
- A shared funding strategy to enable cross-border project development
- Deepening existing partnerships rather than simply adding more institutions

“UAx must go deeper, not just grow wider. Make the relationships count.”
(International Representative 2)

A recurring idea among partners is the empowerment of UAx alumni, not just as beneficiaries, but as future mentors, educators, and researchers. Alumni-led projects, exhibitions, and peer mentoring could extend the programme’s impact, creating a self-sustaining cycle of knowledge and support.

“Let alumni lead. Let them come back as mentors, educators, researchers.”
(International Representative 3)

International partners offered a clear road map for UAx’s future direction. Similar to their Ukrainian colleagues, the International Sister Schools called for :

- Establishing clear post-mentorship pathways
- Launching faculty-to-faculty exchanges and joint teaching initiatives
- Creating structured resources to support collaboration

“There needs to be a pathway beyond mentorship—ways for students to stay involved, like applying for grants or attending ELIA events.” (International Representative 3)

“We hope UAx can focus more on teachers and shared learning spaces for staff, not only mentees.” (International Representatives 4 and 5 [interviewed together])

At the same time, partners emphasised the importance of continuity. They urged UAx to:

- Keep students at the centre of every activity and decision
- Maintain high-touch community spaces for dialogue and solidarity
- Continue advocating for Ukrainian higher arts education in Europe and beyond

To ensure sustainability, partners highlighted the need for strategic investment and shared responsibility. This means securing funding for Ukrainian students as well as European partners, enabling institutions to dedicate time and resources to mentoring, co-teaching, and joint projects.

Among both Ukrainian and international institutions, a clear consensus has emerged: UAx must evolve from a project into a long-term platform. The foundation is already there: strong relationships, shared values, and a proven track record of impact.

Lessons Learned



What worked well

Over three years of experimentation, collaboration, and adaptation, the UAX Platform emerged as a model of solidarity-based higher arts education. Several core elements proved central to its impact:

- **Responsiveness over rigidity.** UAX thrived by adapting to changing contexts rather than relying on fixed structures.
- **Students as co-leaders.** Fellows were not only recipients of support but also creators, community builders, and co-owners of the process.
- **Relational infrastructure.** Sister School partnerships, mentorships, and monthly meetings formed the backbone of the platform, fostering an 'infrastructure of care' that made students, mentors, and institutions feel seen and supported.
- **Inclusive methods.** By using flexible, culturally sensitive approaches, UAX connected people from vastly different contexts in meaningful ways.

Both Ukrainian and international partners reported shifts in how they think about education, from curriculum reform and mentorship practices to deeper cultural empathy and internationalisation strategies.

What needs improvement

- *Uneven mentorship experiences.* While many relationships were transformational, others suffered from mismatches, unclear expectations, or low engagement.
- *Selection and matching.* The processes for choosing students or assigning mentors at times lacked transparency, causing confusion and unmet expectations.
- *Sustainability strain.* Rapid growth stretched team capacity, making it difficult to maintain relational depth across 15 institutions.
- *Underfunded coordination.* Resource gaps, particularly in Ukraine, limited travel and project implementation, leading to uneven collaboration despite shared enthusiasm.

Recommendations for future initiatives

- *Design with co-ownership.* Involve partners from the outset in shaping goals, criteria, and structures. Use participatory consultations and feedback loops to avoid overly centralised decisions.
- *Build relational infrastructure.* Prioritise human connection through regular meetings, informal exchanges, and emotional check-ins. Invest in facilitation that is empathetic, multilingual, and culturally sensitive.
- *Structure with flexibility.* Provide light-touch frameworks that adapt to diverse needs and crises. Recognise that one-size-fits-all models rarely work in transnational or trauma-informed contexts.
- *Balance support across all levels.* Provide resources not only to students but also staff, mentors, and institutions. Consider peer mentorship, staff exchanges, and professional development to ensure sustainability.
- *Make care visible and strategic.* Recognise emotional labour as part of professional practice in mentorship, administration, and community-building. Document and share stories as well as metrics to strengthen advocacy and institutional buy-in.
- *Invest in long-term resilience.* Move beyond short project cycles towards platform-building. Scale not just in numbers, but in the depth of relationships and clarity of purpose.

Beyond the Pilot: Pathways for Sustainability

Although core funding enabled a rapid and impactful launch, UAx's long-term trajectory is in the process of being defined. Sustaining the platform requires multi-year funding, diversified financial streams, and better-resourced support for coordination and travel—elements often underfunded but critical for continuity. As ELIA Team member 3 acknowledged, *“We may have to continue in other formats.”*

Despite these challenges, UAx is increasingly viewed not as a short-term project but as a model of systemic change. As ELIA Team member 4 stated: *“We didn’t just launch a project—we planted seeds. And even if we can’t water all of them at the same time.”* The platform's real legacy lies in the trust, inclusion, and community it has built. ELIA Team member 4 remarked: *“The students, the faculty, the institutions—UAx gave them tools, trust, and each other. That’s the real legacy.”*

UAX is now viewed as a dynamic model of long-term change, fostering solidarity, leadership and creative growth far beyond the borders of Ukraine. While co-creation is part of the ethos of the project (*"We did individual consultations with every school... it wasn't top-down."* ELIA Team member 1), there is a strong desire among the community members to balance the ownership and decision-making among institutions, students, alumni, and mentors from both sides. This includes peer learning between Ukrainian and international partners, as well as the creation of alumni networks that can continue mentoring, collaborating, and building capacity.

UAX's influence is also expanding beyond Ukraine. By combining mentorship, cross-institutional partnerships, and student-centred approaches, it has demonstrated a framework that could serve other art schools in crisis. *"We now have a model. One that could serve other art schools in crisis—not just in Ukraine,"* Facilitator 1 remarked. Facilitator 2 echoed this in their reflections: *"Art and design can create spaces for resilience, dialogue, and hope. That's what this community has shown."*

Future directions under discussion include deeper work at the intersection of arts and health, stronger policy advocacy, and interdisciplinary research collaborations. With its student community and institutional partnerships, UAX is poised to support Ukraine's recovery and reshape how international higher arts education responds to crises, placing solidarity, resilience, and care at the heart of its practice.



List of participating institutions

Ukrainian art institutions	Non-Ukrainian art institutions
<i>2023</i>	
Kyiv National I.K. Karpenko-Karyi University of Theatre, Cinema and Television	Film University Babelsberg Konrad Wolf, Potsdam, Germany
I.P. Kotlyarevsky Kharkiv National University of Arts	HKU University of the Arts, Utrecht, Netherlands
Lviv National Academy of Arts	Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn, Estonia and Academy of Fine Arts, Warsaw, Poland
A.V. Nezhdanova Odesa National Academy of Music	Royal College of Music, Stockholm, Sweden
Kharkiv State Academy of Design and Arts	Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn, Estonia and Academy of Fine Arts, Warsaw, Poland
Academy of Fine Arts in Prague	
<i>2024</i>	
National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture, Kyiv	Oulu University of Applied Sciences, Finland
Kyiv Municipal Academy of Circus and Performing Arts, Kyiv	London Contemporary Dance School, United Kingdom
R. Glier Kyiv Municipal Academy of Music, Kyiv	Berklee College of Music, Valencia/Boston, Spain/USA
Kherson National Technical University, Kherson (Department of IT and Design)	Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology, Warsaw, Poland and School of Design of the Politecnico di Milano, Italy
Transcarpathian Academy of Arts, Uzhhorod	Art Academy of Latvia, Riga, Latvia
University of the Arts London, United Kingdom	

Annexes

2025	
Mykhailo Boychuk Kyiv State Academy of Decorative and Applied Arts and Design	Vilnius Academy of Arts, Lithuania
Faculty of Design of Kyiv National University of Technologies and Design	Oslo National Academy of the Arts, Norway
Luhansk State Academy of Culture and Arts	School of Arts and Design, Polytechnic of Leiria, Portugal
National Academy of Culture and Arts Management, Kyiv	Stockholm University of the Arts, Sweden
Kharkiv State Academy of Culture	LUCA School of Arts, Belgium

Codes of interviewed participants

Students	Student 1
	Student 2
	Student 3
	Student 4
	Student 5
	Student 6
Mentors	Mentor 1
	Mentor 2
	Mentor 3
UA Sister Schools	UA Representative 1
	UA Representative 2
	UA Representative 3

Annexes

International Sister Schools	International Representative 1
	International Representative 2
	International Representative 3
	International Representative 4 and 5 (interviewed together)
ELIA staff and facilitators	ELIA Team member 1
	ELIA Team member 2
	ELIA Team member 3
	ELIA Team member 4
	Facilitator 1
	Facilitator 2

Data sources

Type of data	Number of responses
Survey (4 groups)	Mentors – 10 responses (2025) and 7 responses (2024) Students – 23 responses (2025 fellows survey) and 16 responses (2024) Ukrainian institutions – 12 institutional responses (2025) Non-Ukrainian institutions – 8 institutional responses (2025)
Interviews (22)	ELIA staff and facilitators – 6 interviews International partner institutions – 4 interviews Ukrainian institutions – 3 interviews Students – 6 interviews Mentors – 3 interviews
Testimonials	18 first-person reflections from 2023 Abakanowicz Fellows highlighting individual pathways through the programme
Project documentation and observation	21 monthly meeting summaries 6 UAx Day reports (Helsinki 2022, Évora 2023, Manchester 2023, Milan 2024, plus follow-ups) Founding documents (UAx 2022 proposal, concept papers, steering group notes)

Photo credits

Ux Platform meeting at ELIA Leadership Symposium 2023 in Manchester, photo by Tom Cox <p1>

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Ux Platform meeting at ELIA Biennial 2022 in Helsinki, photo by Roosa Oksaharju <p21>

Students at Ux Fellows Symposium, Uzhhorod 2025, photo by Anna Kosenko <p24>

Students at Ux Fellows Symposium, Uzhhorod 2024, photo by Vladyslav Nikorchuk <p29>

Student at National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture, Kyiv, 2024, photos by David Ross <p33>

Ux Platform meeting at ELIA Biennial 2024 in Milan, photo by Davide Marchesi <p37>

Ux students from Glier Kyiv Municipal Academy of Music performed at Club Matisse as part of their week at Berklee Valencia, 2025, photo by Tato Baeza <39>

Student at National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture, Kyiv, 2024, photos by David Ross <p45>

Students at Ux Fellows Symposium, Uzhhorod 2025, photo by Anna Kosenko <p49>

Students at Ux Fellows Symposium, Uzhhorod 2025, photo by Dariia Lohvynova <p51>

Students at Ux Fellows Symposium, Uzhhorod 2025, photo Oleksandra Do <p53>

Ux Platform meeting at ELIA Biennial 2024 in Milan, photo by Davide Marchesi <p54>

Students at Ux Fellows Symposium, Uzhhorod 2025, photo by Dariia Lohvynova <p57>

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Impressum

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