Science and Innovation Landscape in the Gulf

The Sultanate of Oman is an Arab country on the southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula, placing it in a strategic geographic position at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. It is the oldest independent state in the Arab world, and the capital, Muscat, has a population of 1.56 million. Oman is the 25th largest oil producer in the world, and being aware that its oil reserves will become depleted in approximately 17 years, is now diversifying its activities into areas such as aquaculture.

Oman (R&D: 78) has invested in education and research since the 1970s when the present Sultan ascended to power. The literacy rate has risen to 86.9% since then, and the first University, Sultan Qaboos University, opened in 1986. Sohar University was established in 2001, along with other higher education institutions include the University of Nizwa, one of the fastest growing in Oman; Dhofar University; and the Higher College of Technology with six colleges of applied sciences.

In Oman there are niche R&D partnership opportunities. Oman currently spends 0.2% of GDP in R&D, concentrating on health, water and arid agriculture, managed through The Research Council, although the majority of its funding for research has been frozen due to the current economic landscape. Sultan Qaboos University is the most active research institution in the country, along with the Middle Eastern Desalination Research Centre (MEDRC), an international organisation which concentrates on research, training, knowledge exchange and capacity building related to fresh water scarcity.

In September 2017, the University of Sheffield Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre launched a manufacturing centre with Oman to be run from Sohar University. The centre will focus on advanced machining, specialist assembly, material development, optimised design, rapid prototyping and engineering testing to support the strategic development in the supply chains of the aluminium, steel, composites and polymer industries.
UK Science and Innovation in Oman

Symposia
In 2017, SIN-Gulf organised a series of regional collaboration science Symposia, in cooperation with BEIS and the British Council. The topics included: Innovation in Muscat, Oman; Genomics and Precision Medicine, King Saud University, Riyadh; and Smart Cities, organised in partnership with the Masdar Institute in Abu Dhabi. Each event was attended by researchers from the UK and all six Gulf countries.

In October, SIN, with BEIS and the British Council, organised a Symposium on Clean and Renewable Energy, in Abu Dhabi with participants from the different Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the UK. In November, SIN organised a symposium on Cyber Security in Manchester, attended by 25 participants from across the GCC countries and 35 participants from the UK.

Finally, in March 2018, SIN, with BEIS and the British Council, again organised two regional events: a Symposium on Agritech, Aquaculture and Food Safety, that took place in Muscat, Oman, and a Symposium on Waste Water Management - Treatment and Reuse, held in Kuwait. There was a strong presence from Oman at both events.

Institutional Links Programme
The UK-Gulf Institutional Links programme was launched in 2016 to promote collaborative research partnerships between the UK and Gulf research institutions. It funded eight collaborative 2-year long projects for up to £400,000 each, one of which was awarded to a project on Food Security in collaboration between the University of Sheffield and Sohar University. This project concentrates on the development and demonstration of an innovative method for the expansion of agriculture that significantly reduces fresh water consumption.

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