



UK Science & Innovation Network Country Summary

Belgium

1. Science and Innovation Landscape

At the national level, Belgian Research & Development (R&D) spending has steadily increased over the past few years. This has been from 2.76% of GDP in 2018 to **3.43% of GDP in 2021 (compared to the EU 27's 2.27%)**. R&D figures differ amongst the three regions in Belgium, with each regional government competent for its own economic and innovation policy. Science, research, and innovation competencies are split amongst the six Belgian governments (Federal, Flemish, Brussels Capital, Walloon, French-speaking Community, German-speaking Community). **Innovation is a regional competency:** Each region has their own R&D initiatives, policy, and spending. Relevant governments: Flemish Government, Walloon Regional Government, Brussels Capital Regional Government). **Research can be a Federal, Regional and Community competency.** This is given that: Higher Education (including universities) falls under the Community governments; Research, if linked to a specific competency, belongs to the federated entity in charge of the competency.

The Federal Government coordinates Belgian participation to European programmes with the Communities and Regions, through the Federal Science Policy Office (BELSPO). [BELSPO](#) is also responsible for coordinating “the scientific section of the bilateral agreements for economic, industrial, scientific and technological cooperation which Belgium has concluded with a number of countries”.

The three regions have their own R&D initiatives, policy, institutions, and spending. For example, Brussels Capital Regional (BCR) has its Regional Innovation Plan 2021-2027, which forms the basis of the BCR's research and innovation policy and involves six societal challenges. These consist of, 1- Climate & Energy, 2- Resource optimisation, 3- Mobility, 4- Healthy and sustainable food, 5 - Health and well-being, and 6 - Participative & inclusive society. A key player stimulating innovation in Brussels is Innoviris, the Brussels Institute for Research and Innovation, who finance innovative projects for enterprises, research organisations and non-profit organisations. In 2022, Innoviris had a budget of about €46m and granted 378 subsidies.

In Belgium, universities are important partners within the science and innovation landscape and highly successful EU funding recipients. KU Leuven University tops the list of top 10 Belgian Horizon 2020 beneficiaries with €253.84m. The Flemish universities of Ghent, Antwerp and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel also feature in the top 10.



Amongst the francophone universities, the Université Catholique de Louvain features as the 6th top Belgian Horizon 2020 beneficiary, with €71.41m received.

Belgium is the 1st most innovative country in Europe as per the 2023 European Innovation scoreboard.

2. UK- Belgium Partnership on Science, Innovation and Technology

There are many links between the UK and Belgium. Since 2021, Life Sciences (and health) is part of a wider bilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) (called [United Kingdom-Belgium Joint Declaration on Bilateral Cooperation](#)) to strengthen collaborations.

In the universities sector, for example Oxford and Cambridge university have links with KU Leuven and Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB). Warwick university with ULB and Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). The Philippe Wiener-Maurice Anspach Foundation aims to promote cultural relations between ULB and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

There are also strong links between institutes, for example between UK Dementia Research Institute (UKDRI) and VIB-KU Leuven centre for brain and disease research. With Prof. Bart de Strooper having both affiliations and who was director of UKDRI from 2016 to 2023.

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