



## UK Science & Innovation Network Summary

# Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

### 1. Science and Innovation Landscape

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Under the transformation agenda Vision 2030, efforts are underway in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to shift the country towards a knowledge-based economy, reducing its reliance on fossil fuels and growing high-value science and technology sectors. Research and Innovation (R&I) is seen as a major catalyst and the sector has undergone significant restructuring to deliver coherent outcomes towards this agenda, notably with the establishment of the Research, Development and Innovation Authority (RDIA) in 2021, and the launch of the first R&I funding calls under the RDIA in 2023. Furthermore, KSA intends to increase its investment in R&I from 0.4% to 2.5% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2040 (Source: [RDIA-Elsevier R&I report 2023](#)).

#### Government structures and policies

The long-term strategic direction of R&I in KSA is set by a Supreme Committee for Research, Development and Innovation chaired by the Prime Minister, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. Since 2021, the Research, Development and Innovation Authority ([RDIA](#), Acting Head HE Dr Mohammed Alotaibi) acts as the national R&I enabler, legislator and regulator, as well as the major R&I funder. Other KSA ministries hold significant R&I budgets or directly fund applied research and development national centres, with the Ministry of Education continuing to drive capacity building through its scholarship programme.

Four research, development and innovation national priorities have been defined: Health and Wellness, Sustainable Environment and the Supply of Essential Needs, Energy and Industries, and Economies of the Future. KSA is expected to launch several "moonshot" missions of global relevance (and corresponding technology roadmaps) for each of the four priorities.

#### Research and Innovation in numbers

KSA researchers authored 59,000 research publications in 2022. Research outputs have increased by 25% annually since 2018. The academic sector is the largest contributor, but the private and governmental sectors, notably specialist hospitals and medical research centres, account for 4% of publications (Source: [RDIA-Elsevier R&I report 2023](#)). In 2023, Saudi Arabia



was ranked 48<sup>th</sup> in the Global Innovation Index (GII), entering the list of the top 50 most innovative countries for the first time (Source: [GII 2023](#)).

### Research and Innovation Institutions

KSA can rely on a critical mass of institutions across the value chain of R&I:

- 124 research centres and 180 research chairs – e.g., King Abdulaziz City of Science and Technology ([KACST](#)), King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center ([KAPSARC](#)), King Fahd Specialist Hospital and Research Center ([KFSHRC](#)) and King Abdullah International Medical Research Center ([KAIMRC](#)).
- 60+ public and private universities, with five research intensive universities currently at the vanguard of Saudi Arabia's growing research landscape; [King Saud University](#), [King Abdulaziz University](#), King Abdullah University of Science and Technology ([KAUST](#)), [King Khalid University](#), and King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals ([KFUPM](#)).
- Scientific and technology parks and incubators including [Riyadh Valley Company](#); [The Garage Innovation District](#); [KAUST Innovation](#)).
- [The Saudi Space Agency](#)

## 2. UK-KSA Partnership on ST&I

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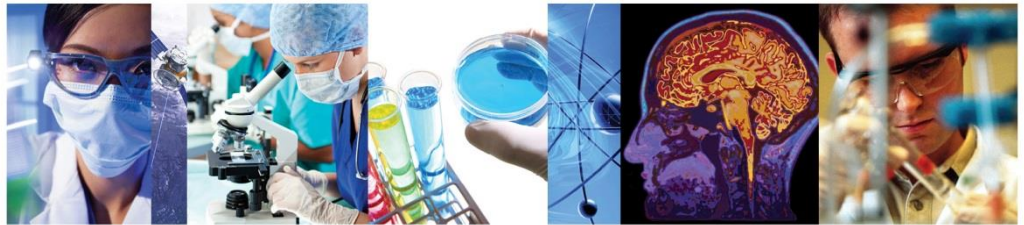
The UK is well positioned in KSA and seen as a strategic partner of choice for knowledge transfer collaborations, third only to the US and China (Source: [Nature](#)). R&I partnerships are often built on student mobility; the UK being the second most popular destination for Saudi students studying abroad (Source: [British Council 2022](#)). Over 50 formal partnerships between UK and KSA universities and research centres have been documented, ranging from joint centres of excellence, research chairs, research collaborations, visiting researcher programmes and joint supervision agreements.

R&I is a cross-cutting aspect of the partnership sectors covered by the UK-KSA Strategic Partnership Council (Source: [Joint Statement 2024](#)). A Memorandum of Understanding was signed in March 2024 between the UK's Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and KSA's Research, Development and Innovation Authority (Source: [Press statement](#)). Its implementation foresees knowledge exchange in science and innovation policy, support for activities across both R&I communities, promoting partnerships, excellence and innovation, and monitoring of the bilateral R&I relationship.

In October 2023, ahead of KSA's participation during the inaugural AI Safety Summit at Bletchley Park, a roundtable on AI ethics and regulation was held in Riyadh with the Saudi Data and AI Authority ([SDAIA](#)). During the 2022-2023 financial year, the UK supported R&I-related activities



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in Saudi Arabia focusing on waste-to-energy technologies (Aston University), climate, health and environmental resilience (CEFAS), future of flight (Connected Places Catapult), and sustainable agritech (led by Rothamsted Research), among others.

### 3. SIN contacts

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