



UK Science & Innovation Network Summary

Estonia

1. Science and innovation landscape

Estonia ranks 16th at the Global Innovation Index. According to [Statistics Estonia](#), in the year 2023, the total Research & Development (R&D) expenditure was of 702.19 million euros. Representing a share of R&D expenditure in GDP of 1.8%. [Private R&D investments](#) were 1% of GDP. Estonia's main innovation strengths are:

- government's online service (rank 1)
- information and communication technology (ICT) services imports
- percentage of % total trade (rank 1)
- Unicorn* valuation, % GDP (rank 1)

*A unicorn is defined as a start-up that is valued at one billion dollars or more.

Estonia is ranked 7th in the EU by research and development intensity and is significantly ahead of other Baltic States.

Estonia has a world-class track record in building unicorns. So far, Estonia has been the birthplace of 10 unicorns: Skype in 2005, Playtech in 2007, Wise in 2015, Bolt in 2018, Pipedrive in 2020, Zego, ID.me and Gelato in 2021, Veriff and Glia in 2022. That represents 7.7 unicorns per million capita.

Government priorities and funding

The Ministry of Education and Research is the main responsible body for research policy (<https://www.hm.ee/en>). The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications is responsible for planning and implementation of R&D activities and innovation policy related to business (<https://www.mkm.ee/en>). The Estonian Research and Development, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Strategy 2021 to 2035 (adopted by the Government in



2013) and the Estonia's long-term development strategy 'Estonia 2035', are the main strategic documents marking the path for the country.

The Research and Development Council advises the Government of the Republic on matters related to R&D strategy, programmes, public research funding and institutions. Public research funding is mainly administered through the Estonian Research Council. It is also responsible for institutional and personal research funding in Estonia and providing support for participation in Horizon Europe and other international research programs. The new Education and Youth Authority was established on 1 August 2020 as a result of a merger of 4 educational institutions. It aims to better coordinate and implements programmes and projects around training, education and research. Enterprise Estonia promotes business and provides financial and counselling assistance for entrepreneurs, research institutions and the public and non-profit sectors.

Higher education and research landscape

There are 18 universities offering higher education in Estonia:

- 6 public research universities
- 1 privately owned research university
- 7 state universities of applied sciences
- 4 private universities of applied sciences

44.628 students were enrolled in Estonian higher education institutions in 2023, and the share of foreign students constitutes more than 9%, mostly from other European countries, and 108 students from the UK.

Most research and development in Estonia is performed at the universities, 6 research institutes, and 6 technology competence centres. These are state-supported independent research organizations focusing on long-term cooperation between academia and businesses. Their main topics are health, food technologies and ICT services. Currently there are 5000 researchers (full-time equivalent) mostly working in public universities and the share of foreign researchers has reached 10%.

Research strengths

The strongest research fields in Estonia are:



- clinical medicine
- molecular biology & genetics
- biology & biochemistry
- immunology
- neuroscience and behaviour
- plant & animal sciences
- microbiology
- space science
- physics
- psychiatry/psychology

Publishing activity of academic papers shows a high level of research. For the publications published in 2014-2024 by Estonian authors, 15.4% reached 10% of the world's most cited publications. This places Estonia #4 in the EU.

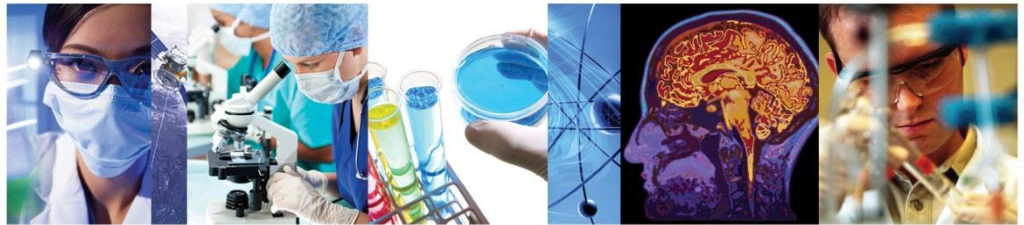
Estonia participation in EU programmes

Estonian researchers' participation in the Horizon 2020 was successful compared to other EU13 countries (which joined the European Union since 2004) especially in coordinating Horizon 2020 projects. The success rate of eligible applications was 13.71% (EU=12.02%). So far, 567 Estonian research projects have been awarded more than £195M.

2. UK partnership with Estonia on science technology and innovation

Total trade in goods and services (exports plus imports) between the UK and Estonia was £1.0 billion in the four quarters to the end of Q4 2023. This represents an increase of 1.5% or £15 million in current prices from the four quarters to the end of Q4 2022.

The UK-Estonia Tech Partnership was signed in 2022. Goals of closer cooperation are agreed with the framework. First, learning from each other in healthcare, education and children's services, digital governance and data innovation. Second, bilateral cooperation in the cyber field, data management, development and implementation of public sector algorithmic transparency standards, development cooperation and fight against online



threats. Thirdly, cooperation in international frameworks in the field of trusted connectivity and internet freedoms.

The Estonian government launched a legal sandbox for UK startups to test new regulations aimed at removing “bottlenecks” that hamper innovation. The sandbox was launched by Accelerate Estonia, a government-backed innovation lab. UK tech companies will be supported by Oxford-based consultancy Oxentia.

3. Science and Innovation Network contacts

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