POLICY ANSWERS

Research and Development Practices and Resources in the UK: Insights from a Peer Learning Study Visit

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List of abbreviations

ARIA	Advanced Research and Invention Agency
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BBF	Business Basics Fund
DSIT	Department for Science, Innovation & Technology
DSI	Digital Social Innovation
DEI	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
EDCI	European Digital City Index
FAIR	Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable
FEC	Full Economic Costing
GBP	Pound Sterling
GEP	Gender equality plan
HEIs	Higher education institutions
IAAs	Impact acceleration accounts
IGL	Innovation Growth Lab
IRCa	Interdisciplinary Research Collaboration
KTPs	Knowledge Transfer Partnerships
KSAs	Knowledge, skills and attitudes
ORIEL	Oxford Regions, Innovation & Enterprise Lab
OSE	Oxford Science Enterprises
OSI	Oxford Sciences Innovation
OxWIB	Oxford Women in Business
PBIAA	Place Based Impact Acceleration Account
PDs	Programme Directors
POLICY ANSWERS	Project Acronym for " R&I POLICY making, implementation ANd Support in the WEsteRn BalkanS"
R&D	Research and Development
RIE	Research, Innovation and Enterprise
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
TTOs	Technology transfer offices
NESTA	UK Innovation agency for social good
UKRI	UK Research and Innovation
UK	United Kingdom

1 Introduction

Research and Development (R&D) refers to the systematic process of investigating, experimenting, and innovating to create new products, processes, or technologies [1]. It is a crucial component of both corporate and government strategies, aimed at driving innovation and competitiveness [1]. By encouraging innovation and enhancing productivity, R&D plays a key role in promoting economic growth in one country. For businesses, it is essential to remain competitive by developing new offerings or improving existing ones [2]. R&D allows companies to secure intellectual property rights, such as patents, and can lead to increased productivity and market share [2]. However, R&D activities often carry significant financial risks due to their long-term nature and uncertain returns on investment [3].

In the United Kingdom (UK), research and development are supported through a range of initiatives, which will be further analysed in this report. The UK government's commitment to increasing R&D investment underscores its importance in driving economic growth and addressing societal challenges. Overall, R&D is a vital component of innovation strategies globally, enabling companies and nations to adapt to changing market conditions and technological advancements [4].

This report aims to analyse R&D activities in the UK from a peer-learning perspective, highlighting practices and programmes implemented by the innovation and R&D organisations visited by the Foundation for Management and Industrial Research during the POLICY ANSWERS peer-learning study visit to London and Oxford (17-21 February 2025). Furthermore, it will explore how the UK's practices in R&D and innovation can be applied to North Macedonia, identifying potential areas and stakeholders for implementation as well as relevant resources like publications, initiatives, policies and programmes.

2 R&D landscape in the UK

R&D is a vital component of the UK's economic strategy, driving innovation and technological advancements. The UK government has committed to increasing public R&D investment to GBP 22 billion by 2026/27, aiming to reach 2.4 % of GDP spent on R&D by 2027 [5]. This ambitious target underscores the government's commitment to cementing the UK as a "science superpower" and innovative nation [6].

In 2023, UK businesses spent GBP 50 billion on R&D, marking a 2.9 % increase from the previous year [7]. The pharmaceuticals sector contributed significantly, with GBP 8.7 billion in R&D expenditure. Regionally, London led with GBP 11 billion in business R&D, followed by the East of England and the Southeast [7]. The UK's R&D expenditure as a percentage of GDP has been reported to be between 2.9 % and 3.0 % in recent years [5].

The UK government supports R&D through various initiatives. The Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT) plays a crucial role in promoting scientific and technological advancements, with a budget of around GBP 13 billion in 2023-24 [8]. UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is another key player, with a budget reaching over GBP 8.8 billion by 2024-2025 [6]. The key sectors driving R&D in the UK include life sciences, quantum technologies, artificial intelligence (AI), and engineering biology. The government has identified these areas as critical for building strategic advantage and capitalising on existing UK strengths [8]. Additionally, stakeholders like the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) focus on high-risk, high-reward research projects [8].

Universities and research institutions are central to the UK's R&D ecosystem. They conduct significant research and collaborate with businesses to drive innovation. UKRI supports these

collaborations through strategic funding, including grants for research and knowledge exchange [9].
In conclusion, R&D is a cornerstone of the UK's economic strategy, with significant investments and strategic initiatives aimed at fostering innovation and growth. By leveraging its world-class universities, innovative industries, and supportive policies, the UK continues to drive advancements in key sectors while addressing societal challenges.

3 Governmental agencies

3.1 UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)

UKRI serves as the UK's primary public body for research and innovation funding, coordinating efforts across multiple councils to advance knowledge and drive economic growth [10].

Research and Development (R&D):

- **New data policy framework:** UKRI is currently developing a comprehensive new research data policy framework aimed at maximising the value derived from UKRI-funded research and fostering an open research culture. This initiative represents a collaborative effort between research councils, Research England, and Innovate UK. A draft version of this policy is scheduled for publication and consultation in spring 2025 [11].
- **FAIR Data Principles Implementation:** The new policy framework will incorporate guidance on data management plans and implementation of FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) data principles. These principles ensure research data is properly structured, preserved, and accessible to the wider research community. The policy aims to streamline expectations and guidance for research data arising from UKRI funding.
- **Open Access Policy:** UKRI mandates that publicly funded research be openly accessible. Peer-reviewed articles must be published under a Creative Commons license to ensure immediate accessibility, promoting transparency and knowledge sharing. Ensures publicly funded research is openly accessible [12].

Entrepreneurship

- **Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs):** Connects businesses with academic institutions. KTPs are a well-established UK government programme supported by Innovate UK (part of UKRI) that facilitates collaboration between businesses and universities [13].
- **Impact acceleration accounts (IAAs):** IAAs are UKRI funding mechanisms that support research organisations in translating their research for impact [14].

Gender Equality

- **Gender equality plan (GEP):** UKRI has established a formal gender equality plan covering 2022 to 2026, demonstrating its commitment to gender equality within its workforce and across the broader research and innovation system. [15] The GEP aims to address the following inequality in Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM):
    - Improves gender balance in leadership roles through targeted programmes (e.g., gold-standard leadership programmes for women),
    - Integrates gender dimensions into research design and funding evaluations,
    - Implement inclusive human resources' policies such as flexible working arrangements by 2025 (e.g., flexible working, parental leave),
    - Combat gender-based harassment through policy reforms and training.
- **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy:** The EDI Strategy is a broader framework that aims to foster a more diverse and inclusive research and innovation system across all aspects of diversity, including but not limited to gender, ethnicity, disability, and

socioeconomic status. The strategy includes specific action plans for each of UKRI's councils and functions, which are regularly updated and expanded [16].

Smart Specialisation

- **Place Based Impact Acceleration Account (PBIAA):** Funded through Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council these projects provide flexible support to research organisations to drive local impact, each focusing on a scientific theme in engineering and physical sciences and targeting a specific region to develop or expand a research and innovation cluster [17] [18].

Digital and Green Transition

- **Building a green future:** UKRI has prioritised environmental sustainability through its "Building a green future" strategic theme, one of five key themes in its "Transforming Tomorrow Together 2022 to 2027" strategy. This initiative aims to accelerate the UK's transition to a secure and prosperous green economy by 2050. UKRI is partnering with UK government departments, businesses, and international organisations to build on their existing GBP 800 million per year portfolio [19].
    - **Targeting national priorities:** Working with the government to co-create research and innovation programmes addressing strategic priorities for green growth in the UK.
    - **Achieving the last 20 %:** Focusing on technologies not yet ready but necessary for reducing emissions beyond 2030, requiring long-term investment and international partnerships.
    - **Accelerating the green economy:** Addressing near-term costs of transition to a low-carbon economy by unlocking solutions and focusing private sector investment through clustering UKRI and government funding in businesses, research, skills, and expertise.

Innovation Financing:

- **Equipment funding and capital thresholds:** From 1 April 2025, UKRI will fund all equipment purchases at 80 % of their Full Economic Costing (FEC), improving cost transparency across research projects. Some exceptions will remain for specific scenarios including fully funded equipment for infrastructure opportunities and international partner costs. Additionally, the threshold for capital equipment will increase from GBP 10,000 to GBP 25,000, reflecting evolving research costs and reducing administrative burdens on smaller purchases [20].
- **Institutional matched funding:** UKRI provides clearer guidance on institutionally matched funding to ensure transparency and fairness. The default position will be that there is no expectation of matched funding, which represents an important shift in funding policy [21]. These updates align with UKRI's commitment to addressing the "sustainability gap" in research funding, as highlighted in their "Research financial sustainability: insights paper" [22].
- **Innovate UK:** Innovate UK is the UK's national innovation agency (part of UKRI) and provides various forms of funding and support to innovative businesses.
- **Horizon Europe:** UKRI ensures compliance with EU funding requirements, including gender equality criteria. Corporate Budget: GBP 39.8 billion allocated for 2022–2025, with GBP 25 billion distributed across UKRI bodies. Includes GBP 2.9 billion for infrastructure and GBP 2 billion for talent initiatives.

3.2 UK Innovation agency for social good (NESTA)

NESTA is a UK-based innovation foundation that promotes social good through innovation, focusing on sustainability, health inequalities, and education.

Research & Development (R&D)

- **Plan I: The Case for Innovation-Led Growth:** Plan I advocates for public investment in R&D for economic growth. The plan focuses on exploring the drivers of innovation, shaping policy to support innovation-led growth, investing in pioneering ventures and programmes, and promoting challenge prizes. The organisation also works to strengthen the evidence base and skills needed for innovation across sectors, while influencing government policy and public discourse to position innovation as central to the UK's future prosperity [23].
- **Evidence-Based innovation**: NESTA emphasises using robust evidence, experimentation, and data for smarter innovation policies. Its **Innovation Growth Lab (IGL)** collaborates with global agencies to test ideas and improve policy-making [24].
- **Business Basics Fund (BBF):** NESTA partnered with the Department for Business, Energy, Industry and Strategy, and Innovate UK to launch the BBF for testing ways to encourage SMEs to adopt productivity-boosting technologies. Through BBF, NESTA promotes inclusive innovation policy, ensuring it benefits more people and places, and allows broader participation in shaping policy decisions [25].

Entrepreneurship

- **NESTA Impact Investments:** NESTA Impact Investments focuses on impact investing. It targets early-stage technology ventures with social or environmental impact, particularly in areas like education, health, and sustainability. NESTA Investments is specifically about providing financial support and expertise to start-ups that align with NESTA's strategic goals, such as improving childcare accessibility, reducing obesity, and promoting sustainable futures [26].
- **European Digital City Index (EDCI):** This project analysed start up ecosystems across 60 European cities. The index helped city leaders assess their ecosystems, guide development priorities, and contributed to the creation of the **European Entrepreneurship and Scale-Up Indices** by the Joint Research Centre [27].
- **Mission Studio**: A joint venture with Founders Factory to launch mission-driven start-ups focused on solving societal challenges, such as eliminating the school readiness gap, reducing obesity in the UK, reducing household carbon emissions, combating loneliness and boosting productivity while supporting a greener economy [28].

Gender Equality [29]

- **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy**: NESTA aims to eliminate gender and ethnicity pay gaps by 2022 and progression gaps by 2025. Measures include transparent pay criteria, mentorship programmes for women from minority ethnic groups, and targeted recruitment outreach.
- **Representation Goals**: By 2025, NESTA's staff profile is expected to reflect UK demographics in ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender, and socioeconomic background. For example, at least 17.3 % of staff will come from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds.
- **Inclusive Innovation Processes**: All innovation missions are designed to benefit minorities groups without widening inequalities. Evaluation data on intersectional impacts is used to inform decision-making.

Smart Specialisation

- **Arloesiadur:** NESTA developed tools like Arloesiadur to help policymakers in Wales navigate innovation systems and enhance regional capabilities [30].
- **The Flying High programme:** Through this programme, NESTA worked with five UK city-regions to understand the demand for drones and the hurdles to their use. By working directly with these regions, NESTA helped them to explore and potentially build capabilities in a new technological area [31].

- **Global Innovation Policy Accelerator**: NESTA led this GBP 4.5 million programme to help innovative leaders from 16 countries strengthen their policy systems and connect with UK expertise in areas like AI and biotechnology [32].
- **Sector-Specific focus**: NESTA Impact Investments target high-impact domains such as AI-driven healthcare tools (e.g., Skin Analytics) and digital educational platforms (e.g., Bibliu) [33].

Digital Transition

- **Digital Social Innovation (DSI):** DSI involves using digital technologies to address social challenges. It often includes initiatives like crowd mapping, networking, research, and policy development to foster digital innovation for social good. The scope of DSI is a broader concept that can be applied across various sectors and organisations, not limited to NESTA. The project covers six different "clusters" focusing on different social areas: health and care[1]; skills and learning[2]; food, environment and climate change[3]; migration and integration[4]; digital democracy[5]; and cities and urban development[6]. [34]

Innovation Financing

- **Support for start-ups**: Through NESTA Impact Investments, NESTA has launched a GBP 50 million strategy to back early-stage technology companies with social or environmental impact. Start-ups at seed or Series A stages receive investments ranging from GBP 500,000 to GBP 4 million across multiple rounds. The programme also provides mentorship, networking opportunities, and access to policy expertise. [35]
- **Permanent Endowment Model**: Funded by a GBP 250 million endowment from the National Lottery, NESTA uses interest income for its programmes. This model ensures financial sustainability without taxpayer funding. [36]
- **Flexible Investment Strategy**: NESTA Impact Investments combines direct investments with grant-making initiatives and partnerships like Mission Studio to maximise social impact while supporting scalable tech companies. With the help of this initiative, start-ups can receive up to GBP 300k. [28]

3.3 Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA)

ARIA is a UK-based research and development funding agency established to drive transformative scientific and technological breakthroughs.

Research & Development (R&D)

- **High-Risk focus**: ARIA prioritises projects with potential for transformative impact. Its GBP 800 million budget supports initiatives like **Programmable plants** (climate-resilient bioengineering) and **Safeguarded AI** (AI safety protocols). [37]
- **Programme Directors (PDs)**: Technical leaders design multi-year R&D programmes, directing funding across disciplines and institutions. PDs also award seed grants for exploratory research. [38]

Entrepreneurship [39]

- **Science-founder support**: Funding terms prioritise inventor-led start-ups, with equity stakes and prize-based incentives to stimulate entrepreneurship.

[1] https://www.nesta.org.uk/feature/mapping-digital-social-innovation/mapping-dsi-health-and-care/
[2] https://www.nesta.org.uk/feature/mapping-digital-social-innovation/mapping-dsi-skills-and-learning/
[3] https://www.nesta.org.uk/feature/mapping-digital-social-innovation/mapping-dsi-food-environment-and-climate-change/
[4] https://www.nesta.org.uk/feature/mapping-digital-social-innovation/mapping-dsi-migration-and-integration/
[5] https://www.nesta.org.uk/feature/mapping-digital-social-innovation/mapping-dsi-digital-democracy/
[6] https://www.nesta.org.uk/feature/mapping-digital-social-innovation/mapping-dsi-cities-and-urban-development/

- **Venture creation**: ARIA collaborates with partners to build entrepreneurial communities, aiming to convert R&D into commercial ventures. Initiatives include mentorship networks and capital inflow strategies.

Smart Specialisation

- **Opportunity spaces**: ARIA targets under-explored areas such as AI, robotics, and biotechnology, fostering sector-specific innovation clusters. These efforts are supported through multi-year R&D programmes designed to advance complex, large-scale ideas that require coordinated investment and cross-disciplinary collaboration. [38]
- **Strategic alignment**: As a public body sponsored by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), it is accountable to Parliament and it select committees and is subject to audits by the National Audit Office. [40]

Digital & Green Transitions [41]

- **Digital Transition:** ARIA supports the development of safer, more efficient digital technologies through programmes like Mathematics for Safe AI and Nature Computes Better. These initiatives aim to ensure powerful AI systems behave safely and to build highly efficient computing systems inspired by nature.
- **Green Transition:** ARIA invests in sustainable solutions addressing climate and environmental challenges. Programmes such as Programmable Plants, Scoping Our Planet, and Future Proofing Our Climate and Weather focus on food security, climate forecasting, and responsible climate intervention.

Innovation Financing

- **Budget Structure**: Combines seed grants (GBP 50k–500k), equity investments, and milestone-based prizes. GBP 800 million allocated over five years (2023–2028) with autonomy to reallocate funds. [42]
- **Public-Private Partnerships**: Collaborates with entities like the **Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)** to scale projects. As a public body sponsored by DSIT, ARIA is accountable to Parliament and it select committees, and is subject to audits by the National Audit Office. [40]

Code of Finance [43]

- ARIA follows a single **business case approach** for expenditures, with delegated financial authorities from DSIT. It must consult DSIT for novel or contentious spending but retains operational flexibility.

4 Oxford based organisations

4.1 Oxford Brookes University

Oxford Brookes University is a leading institution in research and innovation, emphasising entrepreneurship, gender equality, smart specialisation, digital and green transitions, and innovation financing.

Research and Development (R&D):

- **Directorate of Research, Innovation and Enterprise:** Serves as a key hub for advancing research, encouraging industry-academia collaboration, supporting research commercialisation, developing entrepreneurial skills, and providing infrastructure for biotech and digital start-ups, driving innovation and regional economic growth. [44]
- **Centre for Business, Society and Global Challenges:** Focuses on societal issues like refugee entrepreneurship, sustainable tourism, and economic inequality. [45]

- **Oxford Regions, Innovation & Enterprise Lab (ORIEL):** ORIEL is a centre of excellence at Oxford Brookes University that conducts impactful, spatially-informed research on enterprise, entrepreneurship, innovation, and economic development, focusing on sustainability, the future of enterprise, and innovation policy, while actively engaging with public, private, and third sector stakeholders at local, national, and international levels. [46]

Entrepreneurship:

- **Oxford Brookes Enterprise Centre:** It supports start-ups and early-stage companies, particularly in health and life sciences and digital technologies, by providing labs, offices, and co-working spaces. A key benefit is access to academic expertise, student talent, and specialist facilities. [47]
- **Engage and Innovate Programme:** Facilitates partnerships with businesses and public organisations through consultancy, Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs), and technology licensing. [48]
- **Green Skills for Small Business Programme:** A collaboration with Small Business Britain offering sustainable business education. [49]

Gender Equality

- **Athena SWAN Charter:** Commitment to gender equality in academia. [50]
- **GEARING-Roles Project:** Development of a Gender Equality Plan aligning with European Commission priorities. [51]
- **Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice:** Leads gender equality projects, including the CASPER project. [52]
- **The Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Network:** As of May 15, 2024, the British Standards Institute is nationally highlighting their ongoing Menstrual Equity initiative. [53]

Smart Specialisation, Digital and Green Transition:

- **DIGIT Lab:** DIGIT Lab aligns with smart specialisation by focusing on strategic sectors and interdisciplinary collaboration, securing over GBP 9.2M in research funding and delivering impactful projects (e.g., AI in design, digital twinning, circular economy, Open Finance, and professional services). Through outputs like toolkits, software, films, and the Veris app, and by engaging with industry and public sectors via a “network of networks” approach, it drives digital innovation and builds competitive advantages across the UK. [54]
- **Innovation and Research Caucus:** Provides evidence-based insights into UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Innovation Financing:

- **Directorate of Research, Innovation and Enterprise (RIE):** RIE manages funding opportunities such as Proof of Concept Awards and supports applications for Innovate UK's ICURe programme to accelerate commercialisation of research. [44] [55]

4.2 Oxford Women in Business (OxWIB)

Oxford Women in Business (OxWIB) is a student-run society at the University of Oxford, founded in 2008. It is dedicated to supporting and empowering young women and non-binary individuals in exploring various career pathways and opportunities in the business world.

Entrepreneurship

- **Mentorship & training**: OxWIB runs an international mentorship programme and skills workshops to empower women and non-binary individuals in entrepreneurial ventures. [56]

- **Events/Networking opportunities:** OxWIB provides their members with information from various industries, including finance, consulting, science, and taxes to inspire and educate its members. [57]
- **Workshops and skills development:** The society offers practical workshops, case studies, and interview preparation to help members enhance their professional skills. [58]

Innovation Financing

- **Collaboration with Oxford University Innovation**: OxWIB aligns with initiatives like the **IDEA programme**, which aims to increase women founders/co-founders of spinout companies from 15 % (2015–16) to 34 % by 2025. Recommendations include addressing systemic barriers (e.g., uneven caregiving burdens) and expanding mentorship networks. [59]

Gender Equality

- **Constitutional Objectives**: OxWIB's constitution mandates raising awareness of gender inequality in business, promoting ally ship, and setting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) goals for internal teams. [56]

4.3 Oxford Science Enterprises (OSE)

Oxford Science Enterprises (OSE) focuses on creating and funding transformational businesses in Deep Tech, Life Sciences, and Health Tech through its partnership with the University of Oxford.

Research & Development (R&D)

- **Investment in innovation:** OSE has invested GBP 0.8 billion in over 100 companies, leveraging Oxford's research excellence across three high-impact sectors - Deep Tech, Life Sciences and Health Tech. [60]
- **Infrastructure development:** In 2022, OSE partnered with Lothbury to redevelop Oxford's Clarendon Centre, creating 30,000 sq. ft. of lab and office space for early-stage life science companies. This project, operational by 2024, supports R&D scalability. [61]
- **University collaboration:** OSE advocates for universities to trial spinout products internally and provide cloud computing resources to start-ups, enhancing R&D efficiency. [60]

Entrepreneurship

- **Talent pipeline:** OSE promotes career opportunities to retain academic talent in spinouts. [62]
- **Investor engagement:** The company hosts events with Oxford University Innovation to attract global investors, securing GBP 1.8 billion in co-investment for portfolio firms. [60]

Gender Equality

- **Institutional reforms:** While not directly detailed in OSE's policies, the University of Oxford's Department of Materials holds an Athena SWAN Bronze Award for gender equality, emphasising bias reduction and support networks. [63]
- **Gender parity initiatives:** Through Oxford University Innovation's IDEA programme, OSE aims to increase women founders/co-founders from 15 % (2015–16) to 34 % by 2025. Recommendations include addressing systemic barriers, expanding mentorship, and boosting funding for women-led ventures. [59]

Smart Specialisation

- **Cluster development:** OSE advocates for sector-specific clusters (e.g., AI, cybersecurity [60]) to foster collaboration between academia, industry, and investors. This mirrors the

EU's RIS3 strategy, which prioritises context-driven innovation. OSE emphasises aligning regional innovation strategies with national agendas, as seen in the UK's focus on AI sector growth.

Digital & Green Transitions

- **Deep Tech focus:** Invests in high-tech solutions through its deep tech portfolio (e.g., AI, quantum, etc.), advancing digital innovation.
    - **AI leadership:** OSE highlights the UK's 4th-ranked global AI sector (GBP 3.7bn GVA) and calls for coordinated action to maintain competitiveness, including cloud computing access and university-led trials of AI solutions.
- **Green transition [64]**
    - While not explicitly addressed, OSE's Life Sciences and Health Tech investments intersect with sustainability goals (e.g., climate-resilient materials).
    - **Sustainable practices:** Encourages recycling, responsible energy use, and partners with companies that have strong environmental policies.
    - **Impact investing:** Assesses environmental impact before investing and supports start-ups with green policies and carbon tracking.

Financing [65]

- **Funding model:** OSE was established as a joint venture with the University of Oxford, which holds a non-dilutive 5 % stake in return for granting OSE 50 % of its founding equity in spinouts from the science departments—typically 5–10 % per spinout. OSE invests selectively in these ventures using its own balance sheet. A blanket confidentiality agreement with the University provides early access to ideas, often 1–2 years before others.
- **Investors:** OSE has raised over GBP 850 million (>USD 1 billion) from a diverse group of shareholders including Lansdowne Partners, Braavos, Temasek, Oman Investment Authority, the University of Oxford, M&G, Qatar Investment Authority, GV, OUEM, and the Wellcome Trust.

4.4 Grassroots Business Incubator

Grassroots Business Incubator, or online known as Grassroots Workspace, located in Oxford, is a collaborative space for entrepreneurs, particularly those in the science and technology sectors. It is owned by Oxford Sciences Innovation (OSI) and managed by Oxford Innovation.

Research & Development (R&D)

- **Incubation for technology spinouts**: Grassroots Workspace serves as an incubator for technology spinouts, providing a collaborative environment that supports the development of innovative ideas into scalable businesses. [65]

Entrepreneurship

- **Support for innovators**: Grassroots offers a mix of dedicated offices and co-working spaces, along with amenities like meeting rooms and video conferencing facilities. This setup supports early-stage science and technology companies by providing them with the necessary infrastructure and networking opportunities. [66]
- **Networking and community**: The incubator fosters connections between entrepreneurs, postgraduates, professors, and investors, creating a vibrant ecosystem that encourages collaboration and knowledge sharing. **Partnerships with OSI and Oxford Innovation ensure access to experienced mentors and industry experts. [67] [68]**

Business growth and development

- **Tech Nation:** Supports ambitious tech entrepreneurs through growth programmes, digital skills development, and advocacy for the UK's digital sector.

- **Enterprise Europe Network:** Provides support for SMEs with international ambitions, helping them access new markets and opportunities.
- **Growth Hub Oxfordshire:** Simplifies the business support landscape in Oxfordshire, offering advice and directing businesses to expert support.

Innovation and technology

- **Leading Edge Only:** Connects fast-growth start-ups to corporations seeking innovative technologies, facilitating partnerships and collaborations.
- **Oxfordshire Bioscience Network:** Offers lab customers significant supplier discounts, event discounts, tailored training, and savings on conferences. Non-lab companies can also join for benefits.
- **Beauhurst:** Provides a database of the UK's fastest-growing businesses, used by Oxford Innovation to track companies and funding sources. This can help businesses identify potential partners or investors.

Smart Specialisation

- **Local economic development:** Grassroots Workspace contributes to Oxford's innovation ecosystem by supporting local entrepreneurs and spinouts, which helps identify and develop unique regional strengths. The incubator's focus on science and technology aligns with Oxford's specialisation in these sectors.

Innovation Financing

- **Access to funding:** Through partnerships with OSI and other investors, Grassroots Workspace provides access to funding opportunities for its member companies. **[**68**]**

5 Transferable peer-learning practices

This section presents a comprehensive overview of potential initiatives for key institutions in North Macedonia, drawing on successful models from the UK. Each recommendation is tailored to the specific types of organisations listed below.

5.1 Ministries of innovation, entrepreneurship and science

Research and Development

- **Innovation-Led Growth**: co-develop a national plan that positions innovation at the centre of economic growth. The plan shall promote public R&D investment, evidence-based policy design, and the creation of challenge-based R&D programmes to foster systemic transformation.
- **Open Access and FAIR Data**: develop a national policy requiring publicly funded research to be openly published under Creative Commons licenses and mandate the use of FAIR principles in all academic data management plans.
- **National infrastructure assessment**: Conduct a comprehensive audit of research labs, digital tools, and connectivity across higher education institutions to ensure alignment with national innovation and commercialisation objectives.
- **Programme Directors for R&D**: Appoint technical experts to design and lead multi-year research programmes, coordinate cross-sector funding, and manage seed funding schemes that enable exploratory and interdisciplinary projects.

Smart Specialisation **Strategy**

- **Place-Based Innovation acceleration**: Inspired by the UK's PBIAA model, the ministries could pilot regional innovation clusters aligned with the national Smart Specialisation Strategy, focusing on sectoral strengths such as renewable energy in Vardar and Agro-tech

in Pelagonia region. These clusters will promote collaboration between academia, municipalities, and SMEs to strengthen regional competitiveness and innovation capacity.

Green transition

- **Green transformation fund**: The ministries should establish a dedicated funding mechanisms to support SMEs transitioning to low-carbon and circular economy models. The funds can operate through a co-investment structure with public and private partners, similar to Innovate UK's green economy initiatives, supporting applied sustainability at the regional level.

Gender Equality

- **STEM Women in leadership programme**: Launch a scholarship and mentoring programme for women in science and engineering, including leadership training within universities, aligned with UKRI's GEP framework.

Innovation funding

- **Sector-specific challenge prizes**: Launch competitive funding calls to stimulate innovation in tourism technologies, sustainable materials, and AI-driven public services. These challenge prizes aim to drive targeted problem-solving aligned with national priorities.
- **Updated capital equipment policy**: Introduce a new co-financing model that funds up to 80 % of the full cost of research equipment. This will reduce administrative burdens for researchers and reflect the evolving cost of innovation infrastructure.

5.2 Innovation and entrepreneurship agencies

Innovation Financing and Entrepreneurship

- **Impact Acceleration Accounts**: Provide flexible funding to universities and research centres to accelerate commercialisation of publicly funded research. Encourage strategic partnerships between academia and industry through Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs).
- **Flexible innovation finance instruments***:* Offer seed investment rounds for start-ups with social or environmental impact. Include optional prize-based or equity-linked incentives to support later-stage scale-up.
- **Mission-oriented programmes**: Design innovation programmes targeting national priorities (e.g. digital health, e-learning, food security) and implement them in collaboration with incubators and the private sector.
- **Inclusive Innovation Strategy***:* Launch targeted initiatives that promote broader participation in innovation, particularly by SMEs in underserved regions and groups.
- **Financial Literacy Bootcamps**: Launch intensive training programmes to improve start up founders' knowledge of financial management, investment strategies, and business pitching, based on NESTA's Innovation Growth Lab (IGL) model.

Entrepreneurship and Smart Specialisation Strategy

- **Regional Entrepreneurship Labs in partnership with ministries**: Establish grassroots incubators in different cities to support local tech and social start-ups with co-working space, mentorship, and investor matchmaking.
- **Start-up ecosystem indexing**: Conduct ecosystem assessments using methodologies adapted from the European Digital City Index to guide local development strategies and policy interventions.

5.3 Business incubators & innovation hubs

Entrepreneurship

- **Youth Innovation Challenge Fund**: Provide micro grants (€1,000–€5,000) for student teams to prototype innovative solutions in tech and social domains.
- **Research Commercialisation Pipeline**: Partner with universities across the country to identify research with commercialisation potential and support youth researchers in forming start-ups.
- **Innovation Infrastructure Access**: Scale access to lab and office space for early-stage founders through university-based innovation hubs.

Digital and Green Transition

- **Digital Social Innovation Clusters**: Establish thematic labs—HealthTech for girls, GreenTech, EdTech—where youth co-create solutions to pressing societal challenges.
- **Green Skills for Small Business**: Introduce sustainable business education programmes for youth entrepreneurs, focusing on climate-resilient business models.

Gender Equality

- **Gender-Smart Start-up Accelerator**: Develop an inclusive accelerator programme supporting women-led and diverse start-ups, providing mentorship, DEI policies, and access to funding. Inspired by OxWIB and Oxford University's IDEA model.

6 Relevant resources

6.1 Publications

➢ **The Spinout Journey: Barriers and Enablers to Gender Inclusive Innovation**
Keywords: University spinouts, gender inclusion, innovation, academic entrepreneurship, STEM
Targets: higher education institutions (HEIs), university management, technology transfer offices (TTOs), academic entrepreneurs, early career researchers, and senior academics.

This report explores the experiences of women and men in founding STEM university spinouts, identifying key barriers and enablers to gender-inclusive innovation. Based on interviews with 35 founders and 8 key informants, it highlights motivation, institutional support, team dynamics, and perceptions of legitimacy, offering practical recommendations to build a more inclusive spinout ecosystem.
https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/file/03a8920c-2c01-438c-8403-8f1f3241b755/1/Spinout_Journey_FULL_Report_DIGITAL.pdf

➢ **Gender-Inclusive Academic Entrepreneurship: A Framework for Higher Education Institutions**
Keywords: Academic entrepreneurship, gender inclusion, structural barriers, 3Bs Framework, women in STEM
Targets: HEIs, TTOs, academic leaders, and equality managers

This practical framework helps HEIs advance gender-inclusive academic entrepreneurship, especially in STEM spinouts. Built around the "3Bs: Becoming, Building, Bridging," it identifies structural barriers and offers tools—checklists, prompts, case studies—to foster inclusive practices in innovation, licensing, and spinout creation.
https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/file/e1f06b9d-9157-4a97-88f5-376969c41fe8/1/Spinouts%20framework%20for%20HEI%20-%202021.pdf

➢ **The Spinout Journey: Summary Report**
Keywords: Gender equality, academic entrepreneurship, spinouts, inclusion, commercialisation

Targets: HEIs, university leadership, TTOs, and academic entrepreneurs at all stages

This summary examines the gender gap in UK spinouts, where only 13% have a female founder. It reveals gender-specific challenges faced by academic founders and provides insights and recommendations to support inclusive spinout development. https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/file/6689f895-8d34-48af-b018-6db9d216f228/1/Spinout_Journey_SUMMARY_Report_DIGITAL.pdf

- **Women and Spinouts: Overview to the Development Framework for Gender-Inclusive Academic Entrepreneurship**
  Keywords: Women researchers, spinouts, gender-inclusive entrepreneurship, academic support, 3Bs Framework
  Targets: women researchers, HEI leaders, TTOs, and support organisations

  This overview introduces a competency-based framework that encourages and supports women researchers in forming spinouts. It acknowledges structural barriers and emphasises team-based approaches, offering resources to help women navigate and thrive in academic entrepreneurship.
  https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/file/b30035ee-5e8d-4a6d-b1e1-7658ec859553/1/Spinouts_1.1_Overview_of_Resources.pdf

- **Development Framework for Gender Inclusive Academic Entrepreneurship: Knowledge, Skills & Attitudes**
  Keywords: academic entrepreneurship, women founders, experiential learning, 3Bs Framework
  Targets: women researchers, academic entrepreneurs, HEI leadership, and TTOs

  This document focuses on building key knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) drawn from successful women spinout founders. It supports women through experiential learning and highlights the importance of team collaboration and transitional support. https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/file/1b056a26-3ffd-4da0-858d-a41c426c25cf/1/Spinouts_1.2_Development_Framework.pdf

- **Improving Gender Equality in University Spinouts**
  Keywords: Spinout governance, women scientists, bias, networks, innovation
  Targets: women scientists and engineers in academia

  This article highlights the under-representation of women in UK university spinouts. It identifies barriers such as funding gaps, bias, and lack of networks and calls for institutional reforms to support women's participation and success in entrepreneurship.
  https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/items/2f319e2a-c094-448a-9c31-e1b1641cb674/1/?search=%2Fsearching.do&index=2&available=130
  https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/time-end-bias-against-academias-female-entrepreneurs

- **University Spinout Companies: Where Are All the Women?**
  Keywords: Spinouts, gender bias, commercialisation, inclusive innovation, academic careers
  Targets: universities, research institutions, policymakers, and entrepreneurship advocates

  This study finds that just 13% of UK university spinouts have female founders, exposing gendered barriers such as bias from investors and lack of recognition in academic promotion. It recommends inclusive strategies and better institutional support to promote diverse

entrepreneurship.
https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/items/ea831765-e3ed-4c1e-a2b4-04f73e1b6618/1/?search=%2Fsearching.do&index=100&available=130

- **Research and Development Funding Policy**
  Keywords: R&D funding, Horizon Europe, science policy, innovation strategy, public investment, research governance
  Targets: policymakers, government departments, research institutions, higher education leaders, and R&D stakeholders

  Provides an overview of the UK's R&D funding landscape, focusing on public funding mechanisms and recent policy developments. It discusses the government's 2.4% GDP investment target, the establishment of the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology (DSIT), and the creation of the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA). The briefing also examines international collaborations, including the UK's participation in Horizon Europe, and outlines changes to R&D tax credits and governance structures.
  https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7237/CBP-7237.pdf
  https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7237/

- **Business enterprise research and development, UK: 2023**
  Keywords: R&D expenditure, business innovation, statistics, economic growth, sectoral trends
  Targets: policymakers, academic researchers, business leaders, innovation stakeholders

  This bulletin presents the statistics on R&D expenditure by UK businesses in 2023. It details sectoral trends, regional distribution, and year-on-year changes, providing insights into the scale and direction of private sector R&D investment. The data supports evidence-based policy and strategic planning for innovation and economic growth.
  https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/governmentpublicsectorandtaxes/researchanddevelopmentexpenditure/bulletins/businessenterpriseresearchanddevelopment/2023

- **EDCI 2016: updating the European Digital City Index**
  Keywords: digital entrepreneurship, city index, innovation, Europe, policy
  Targets: policymakers, digital entrepreneurs

  The EDCI 2016 update provides a comparative analysis of European cities' support for digital entrepreneurship. It assesses factors such as access to capital, skills, infrastructure, and policy environment, informing strategies to foster digital innovation.
  https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/edci-2016-updating-the-european-digital-city-index/

- **Research, Innovation and Enterprise: Shaping the Future 2024-2025**
  Keywords: research, innovation, creative industries, education strategy
  Targets: policymakers, educators, students, industry partners

  This document outlines the Research, Innovation and Enterprise (RIE) strategy for the screen sector at Oxford Brookes University for 2024–2025. It highlights priorities, partnerships, and initiatives to drive excellence and impact in creative education and industry engagement.
  https://www.brookes.ac.uk/getmedia/26320674-aa26-48ac-87f3-82b4d4e19d5e/rie-shaping-the-future-2024-2025-for-screen.pdf

- **Research Financial Sustainability Insights 2025**
  Keywords: financial sustainability, research funding, resilience, policy

Targets: research leaders, funders, policymakers, finance professionals

This insights paper analyses the financial sustainability of the UK research system, exploring trends, risks, and opportunities for long-term resilience. It provides evidence to inform funding strategies and policy decisions that support a robust research environment. https://www.ukri.org/publications/research-financial-sustainability-insights-2025/research-financial-sustainability-insights-paper-2025/

6.2 Initiatives and programmes

- **Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs)**
  Targets: businesses, academic partners, researchers, innovation managers
  KTPs connect businesses with academic expertise to drive innovation and productivity. This programme supports collaborative projects, enabling organisations to access knowledge, skills, and technology from UK universities and research institutions, fostering economic growth and workforce development.
  https://iuk-ktp.org.uk/discover/

- **KTP Project Costs Guidance: FEC and Non-FEC**
  Targets: KTP applicants, project managers, finance officers
  This guidance document details eligible project costs for Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP), covering both Full Economic Costing (FEC) and non-FEC scenarios. It provides clarity on budgeting, allowable expenses, and funding rules for successful KTP applications.
  https://www.ukri.org/councils/innovate-uk/guidance-for-applicants/costs-we-fund/costs-guidance-for-knowledge-transfer-partnerships/project-costs-for-fec-and-non-fec/

- **UKRI Impact Acceleration Accounts (IAAs)**
  Targets: research organisations, innovation leads, academic entrepreneurs
  Impact Acceleration Accounts (IAAs) provide flexible funding to help UK research organisations accelerate the translation of research into real-world impact. IAAs support activities such as proof-of-concept work, market validation, and partnership development, facilitating innovation and societal benefit.
  https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/browse-our-areas-of-investment-and-support/ukri-impact-acceleration-accounts/

- **Place Based Impact Acceleration Account**
  Targets: regional innovation stakeholders, research organisations, policymakers
  Supports the development and implementation of regional innovation strategies. It funds collaborative projects that address local challenges, foster economic growth, and enhance the impact of research within specific UK regions.
  https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/place-based-impact-acceleration-account/

- **UKRI Strategy 2022-2027: Transforming tomorrow together**
  Targets: policymakers, research leaders, funders, stakeholders
  This strategic plan outlines UKRI's vision and priorities for 2022–2027. It sets out how UKRI will support world-class research and innovation, drive economic and societal benefit, and address national and global challenges through investment, collaboration, and talent development.
  https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/UKRI-210422-Strategy2022To2027TransformingTomorrowTogether.pdf

- **Plan I: Innovation for the UK**

Targets: policymakers, innovation leaders, entrepreneurs, funders
Plan I sets out a comprehensive vision for strengthening the UK's innovation system. It recommends policies and actions to boost R&D investment, foster entrepreneurship, and ensure inclusive growth, positioning the UK as a global innovation leader. https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/plan_i.pdf

- **Innovation Growth Lab**
  Targets: policymakers, researchers, innovation practitioners
  The Innovation Growth Lab (IGL) is an initiative that advances the understanding of innovation and entrepreneurship through experimentation and rigorous evaluation. IGL supports policy development and evidence-based practices to foster economic growth. https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/innovation-growth-lab/

- **Business Basics Programme**
  Targets: SMEs, business support providers, policymakers
  The Business Basics Programme tests and evaluates interventions to help SMEs adopt proven management practices and digital technologies. It aims to improve productivity and competitiveness across the UK business landscape. https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/why-you-should-know-about-business-basics-programme/

- **Founders Factory Mission Studio - Building the next generation of mission-led start-ups**
  Targets: entrepreneurs, investors, innovation ecosystem stakeholders
  Mission Studio by Founders Factory is a venture-building platform that creates and scales new start-ups addressing major global challenges. It provides resources, expertise, and funding to support founders from idea to market. https://foundersfactory.com/mission-studio/

- **NESTA Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy**
  Targets: policymakers, innovation leaders, diversity advocates
  NESTA's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy outlines the organisation's commitment to fostering inclusive innovation. It sets goals and actions to promote diversity in teams, leadership, and decision-making, driving equitable outcomes in the innovation sector. https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Nesta_EDI_Strategy_FA_1.pdf

- **Arloesiadur: an innovation dashboard for Wales**
  Targets: policymakers, regional leaders, innovation analysts
  Arloesiadur is an interactive dashboard providing data and insights on innovation activity in Wales. It supports evidence-based decision-making, enabling stakeholders to monitor trends, identify opportunities, and shape regional innovation policy. https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/arloesiadur-an-innovation-dashboard-for-wales/

- **Global Innovation Policy Accelerator**
  Targets: policymakers, innovation agencies, international partners
  The Global Innovation Policy Accelerator is a collaborative development programme for innovation policymakers. It builds capacity, fosters international networks, and supports the design of effective innovation policies worldwide. https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/global-innovation-policy-accelerator/

- **Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) Corporate Plan 2024**
  Targets: policymakers, research funders, innovators, public sector leaders
  The Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) Corporate Plan 2024 sets out ARIA's mission, strategic priorities, and operational approach for funding high-risk, high-reward

research and innovation projects in the UK. https://www.aria.org.uk/media/12thsgq3/aria-corporate-plan-2024.pdf

- **Interdisciplinary Research Collaboration (IRCa) UK**
  Targets: researchers, funders, research managers, policymakers
  IRCa UK is a national initiative supporting interdisciplinary research collaboration across UK institutions. It provides resources, networking, and funding opportunities to tackle complex societal challenges through cross-disciplinary approaches. https://ircaucus.ac.uk/

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POLICY ANSWERS

ABOUT POLICY ANSWERS

POLICY ANSWERS (R&I POLICY making, implementation ANd Support in the WEsteRn BalkanS) supports policy coordination in the Western Balkans and with the EC and the EU. 14 partner organisations, representing network nodes in the region and EU expert organisations, support policy dialogue through formal meetings (such as ministerial and steering platform and ad-hoc policy meetings), monitoring and agenda setting, capacity building and implementation of the EU's Western Balkan Agenda, as well as the alignment of thematic priorities. The project implements regional pilot activities and offers an information hub based on the westernbalkans-infohub.eu online information platform. The partners provide analytical evidence via monitoring and mapping activities of the stakeholder ecosystem, of the implementation of the Western Balkans Agenda and of the Western Balkans' integration into the European Research Area as well as via strategic foresight. POLICY ANSWERS also allows for tailored and targeted capacity building activities in the Western Balkans as well as regional alignment of priorities in relation to the digital transformation, the green agenda and towards healthy societies. Pilot activities provide learning opportunities on policy and programme level and reach out to final beneficiaries related to improved academia-industry cooperation, researcher mobility, inclusion of youth in policy processes, promotion of research infrastructures and increased innovation skills in all areas.

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