

Saudi Smart Cities Visit to the UK, 2-5 March 2020

Introduction

SBJBC UK was pleased to work closely with the UK Science and Innovation Network (SIN) to organise the Saudi smart city stakeholder visit to the UK from 2-5 March. We also recruited a number of Saudi private sector participants to balance the public sector representation in the delegation, and organised a Smart City and Technology Forum at Level39 on 3 March.

SBJBC UK members contributed to the programme. Founder members Foster + Partners and Trowers & Hamblins hosted the delegation, and a number of SBJBC UK and Saudi members contributed to the discussions both at Level39, and in Birmingham and Harwell.

Feedback from delegates

Feedback from both Saudi delegates and UK institutions visited has been very positive. The Saudi delegates also profited from the contacts they were able to make with each other.

Ahmad Alkhiary (Ministry of Education) expressed “sincere thanks to SBJBC and SIN for the planning and execution of this valuable journey” and mentioned several cooperation opportunities he will be following-up. Hashim Alawadi (CEO, Tech Invest Com) said “Thank you for a well-organised, interesting, and successful mission” and Nasser Alkathiri (National Digitization Unit/MCIT) expressed thanks for “the time and effort put in to arrange such an inspiring trip.”

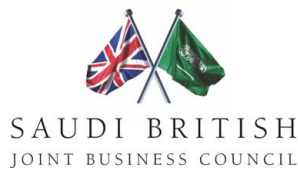
Outcomes & Follow-up

Key objectives of the visit were knowledge exchange and the identification of future collaborative initiatives, building on recent SBJBC/DIT smart city missions to Saudi Arabia.

The visit built on existing institutional partnerships (eg with Imperial College and KAUST) and successfully showcased some of the UK’s innovative technologies (eg through the presentations by the Chief Scientific Advisers of BEIS and DIT). It also allowed delegates to present research and innovation capacity in leading Saudi institutions such as KAUST, National Digitisation Unit, STC, SABIC and the Ministry of Education.

The visit also facilitated B2B contacts with innovative UK companies who presented at Oxford Sciences Innovation (OSI), Harwell and Birmingham. Several of the UK companies have already been in touch to request SBJBC support in Saudi market entry. The Saudi delegates also requested copies of their presentations to follow-up.

The Level39 event included useful exchanges on the role of government, private sector and academia in tech ecosystem development, and updates on major smart city projects and



technology trends. Support available for UK companies through the Saudi Ministry of Investment and NDU were highlighted, and useful networking took place in the margins. The Birmingham programme hosted by Trowers & Hamlins had a very practical focus and successfully highlighted smart city and technology developments in other parts of the UK. The STC representative and other Saudi companies made useful B2B contacts.

Key conclusions

- Wide agreement on the establishment of a UK/Saudi Tech Hub to link accelerators, innovation hubs and entrepreneurs in both countries and to facilitate SME access to potential investors and market support.
- Establishment of a volunteer “angel mentor” panel to help innovative SMEs in market access, drawing on the experience of successful UK and Saudi companies.
- Support for these and other collaborative research initiatives was expressed by key Saudi delegates (eg NDU, SABIC and KAUST), as well as the co-chaired Private Sector Group on Technology & Innovation. SBJBC looks forward to working with SIN and DIT to build on the success of the visit.

Publicity

A press release was issued in English and Arabic through the British Embassy and SBJBC, and carried in Al Iqtisadiyah (Saudi FT equivalent). SBJBC also briefed the Guardian Architecture correspondent and the National in the UAE carried a report on the Tech Hub proposal. There was also wide coverage of the visit in social media.

SBJBC UK
17 March 2020