

Breaking Barriers to Trade Project

Launching Research on the Business Experiences in Each Kingdom

The Saudi British Joint Business Council (SBJBC) invites Saudi Arabian businesses to participate in a landmark research initiative examining bilateral trade experiences. Building on our recent study of British companies operating in Saudi Arabia, we now seek insights from Saudi enterprises engaging with the UK market. We welcome your reflections on the challenges encountered, the concerns addressed, and the successes achieved so that a second report can be generated and both the Saudi and UK business experiences can be presented to the relevant stakeholders and decision makers.

Why This Research Matters Now

As the UK navigates its post-Brexit trading landscape and seeks to strengthen partnerships with key global economies, Saudi Arabian companies represent a vital source of investment, expertise, and commercial collaboration. The Kingdom's Vision 2030 transformation has created unprecedented opportunities for Saudi businesses to expand internationally, with the UK market offering particular appeal due to its sophisticated financial services sector, regulatory frameworks, and strategic position as a gateway to European markets. However, despite the clear mutual benefits, Saudi companies continue to encounter barriers that limit their ability to fully capitalise on UK market opportunities.

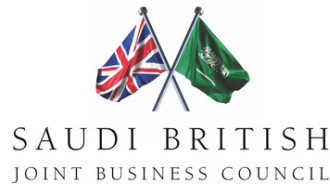
The timing for this research is particularly crucial as both governments work to deepen the UK-Saudi Strategic Partnership and unlock the billions in untapped trade potential. With Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) increasingly active in international markets and the UK actively courting foreign investment to drive economic growth, understanding the real-world experiences of Saudi businesses operating in the UK is essential. This research will provide policymakers and business leaders with the evidence needed to address practical obstacles, streamline processes, and create the conditions for Saudi companies to thrive in the UK market, ultimately benefiting both economies through increased trade, investment, and job creation.

Moving Forward Together

This research represents a renewed commitment to fostering meaningful dialogue that will advance UK-Saudi commercial partnerships. The remarkable pace of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 transformation naturally presents evolving challenges in the business landscape, whilst the UK's own economic priorities continue to shape its approach to international partnerships. This research is designed to understand these dynamics to be utilised through a series of roundtables and follow-up events that encourage collaborative problem-solving, celebrating progress whilst tackling persistent barriers through constructive engagement and shared expertise.

Join us in building a framework where Saudi investment and innovation can seamlessly integrate with UK market opportunities, whilst British companies can effectively support and participate in the Kingdom's economic diversification.

Your insights and participation are fundamental to unlocking the full commercial potential that exists between our two economies.



Phase One

Breaking Barriers to Trade: UK-Saudi Commercial Relations Roundtable Launching Research on UK Business Experiences in Saudi Arabia

The Saudi British Joint Business Council (SBJBC) held a closed-room roundtable at our Mansion House Partnership & Investment Summit on 11th June. This roundtable was inspired by the first phase of research focusing on UK business experiences and the perceived trade barriers they may face when engaging in the Saudi market. The roundtable brought together representatives from the Saudi Ministry of Investment and the UK Department for Business and Trade, alongside the Saudi Commercial Attaché to the UK and various senior business stakeholders.

The roundtable encourages an open and frank discussion between UK businesses and government representatives, feeding directly into the ongoing, high-level positive discussion between the two Kingdoms over proposals to maximise the Saudi-UK trade relationship and ease the means of doing business.

The moderator for the session, Lord Edward Udny-Lister described the research and roundtable as “this year the work of the SBJBC in identifying barriers to trade report was extensively debated by both British and Saudi companies, and possible solutions to ease trade barriers were identified. It was also agreed to start work on the British barriers to identify actions that are needed to support Saudi businesses.”

Delivery of the Report

The roundtable on 11th June marked the reinvigoration of sustained dialogue aimed at moving forward UK-Saudi commercial relations. By bringing together those who shape policy with those who experience its impacts, we can develop practical suggestions that benefit both nations.

The impressive speed of Saudi Arabia's transformation creates inevitable "speedbumps" in the business environment. The roundtable focused on smoothing these obstacles, not through criticism but through constructive engagement that acknowledges achievements whilst addressing remaining challenges.

The Next Phase

Below are the key research findings from phase one, focused on the core challenges that UK businesses have experienced during entering or operating in Saudi Arabia. SBJBC next aims to research and understand the challenges faced by Saudi Arabian businesses in entering and operating in the UK.

This research will form a new report that, combined with the phase one report, will be presented together to both the UK and Saudi Arabian Governments. The experiences of Saudi Arabian businesses must be represented in equal standing to the experiences of UK businesses in Saudi Arabia. Only through an evaluation of both can real bilateral work be conducted to improve the UK-Saudi trade corridor and improve the experiences for both business communities by enhancing the ease of transnational trade.

Join us in shaping a future where Saudi expertise can fully contribute to the UK economy, whilst Saudi businesses of all sizes can sustainably access one of the world's greatest financial and technological markets.

Phase One Findings

Key Barriers Demanding Urgent Attention

From Our UK Business Research

Our research identifies several critical barriers that UK businesses have experienced while entering or operating in Saudi Arabia that require dialogue and a coordinated response:

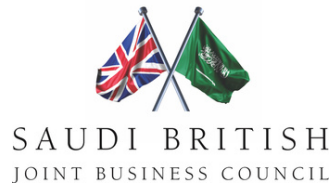
Payment Delays and Financial Risk: Over 54% of UK businesses interviewed reported payment delays, with some experiencing waits exceeding 18 months. This cash flow crisis particularly impacts SMEs, effectively excluding innovative smaller firms from market participation. Without addressing this issue, other improvements in the business environment may have a limited impact.

Regulatory Complexity and Administrative Burden: An overwhelming 66.7% of respondents struggle with the portal registration processes, whilst 58.3% face bidding process challenges. The disconnect between published regulations and practical implementation creates fundamental uncertainty, with companies unable to predict outcomes even when following official guidelines. Greater understanding is needed by UK companies on how to proceed, and we hope this can be gained from this dialogue.

Inter-ministerial Coordination Failures: The appearance of difficulties in coordination between Saudi government entities enhances administrative complexity. Businesses feel like they are navigating overlapping jurisdictions, with trademark registration disconnected from business naming, and licensing requirements dispersed across multiple ministries.

Saudisation Implementation Challenges: Whilst greatly supporting localisation objectives, companies report that current quota-based approaches force suboptimal outcomes. The scarcity of qualified professionals in specialised fields, combined with tight timeline requirements, creates operational strain that makes it difficult to develop local capability and maintain service quality.

Contract Imbalances: Standard government contracts impose unlimited liability whilst offering only minimal payment protection, creating risks for international service providers. These templates, designed at times for the wrong sector or bid, prove inappropriate.



Phase Two

Launching Research on Saudi Business Experiences in the UK

We are now moving on to Phase Two of this project. The goal is to now work with Saudi businesses on identifying and understanding the challenges that they face in the UK. This research is essential to the SBJBC as part of our work supporting both the Kingdom's trade ambitions and business communities. Following the completion of this next report, a similar roundtable and launch event will be convened to discuss British trade barriers that impact the full engagement of Saudi businesses in the UK market.

Your participation is essential to ensuring that the considerable potential of UK-Saudi commercial relations can be fully realised.

How to Get Involved

SBJBC is looking to discuss this project with Saudi businesses currently engaged in the UK market. If you would like to take part, please reach out to robert@sbjbc.org for more information.

What is Involved

An initial survey will be sent to participants covering a wide range of topics, from business details, trade volumes, and reviews on aspects of doing business in the UK. There will also be long-answer questions looking at the key trade barriers encountered by Saudi businesses.

Following this survey, those who wish to be involved further will be invited to an interview. This interview will enhance the survey responses through deeper questions to form case studies that will be represented in the report.

All respondent information will be held in absolute anonymity. The report will not mention any business names or individuals to ensure that all identities remain protected.

Following the report, a second roundtable will be convened. This roundtable will be similar to the first one, focused on UK business challenges. SBJBC will aim to gather representatives from the Saudi and UK governments, alongside businesses willing to share their experiences with both governments. The goal will be to raise the issues that Saudi businesses experience in the UK market and encourage the UK government to openly discuss them and work towards solutions.

From this second roundtable, both the UK and Saudi business reports will be launched together at a follow-up event. This will be the start of the process to encourage both Kingdom's governments and business communities to come together and work towards the common goal of maximising their bilateral trade potential.