



SAUDI BRITISH
JOINT BUSINESS COUNCIL

Blueprint for Excellence

The Case for a Common Blueprint



The Construction Context

Saudi Arabia's construction market produced a mixed set of figures over the first half of 2026, with a weak opening quarter followed by a recovery in the second. Contract awards across the Kingdom came to 30 billion US dollars in the second quarter, which Kamco Invest recorded as a rise of 160.4% on the first quarter and of 53.6% on the second quarter of 2025, leaving Saudi Arabia as the only Gulf state to grow on both measures during a period disrupted by the Iran war.¹ That figure followed a first quarter of 11.5 billion US dollars, the second lowest quarterly total recorded in more than five years.² Within the second quarter total, construction awards reached 14.2 billion US dollars, an increase of 184.4% on the same quarter of the previous year.³ The Saudi Contractors Authority recorded eighteen awards worth more than 30 billion riyals in May, and twenty-five awards worth more than 29.5 billion riyals in June, the highest monthly count of the year, of which fourteen were building projects worth over 20.6 billion riyals between them and accounting for 56% of the value awarded that month.^{4,5}

Awards on the giga-project programme have moved on a longer downward course, having risen each year to almost 33 billion US dollars in 2023 before falling to just under 25 billion US dollars in 2024 and declining sharply again through 2025.⁶ The wider Saudi market followed the same direction over that period, producing 25.7 billion US dollars of awards in the first half of 2025, approximately 44.2 billion US dollars below the equivalent period of the previous year, and closing the year at 84.5 billion US dollars against a record 164 billion US dollars in 2024.^{6,7} The Public Investment Fund recorded a write-down of eight billion US dollars in its 2024 annual report, and the carrying value of its giga-project investments fell by 12.4% to 211 billion riyals.⁸ Work on The Line was suspended in September 2025 and the scheme is being redesigned, contracts worth approximately six billion US dollars at the Trojena mountain resort have been terminated, and the 2029 Asian Winter Games have moved from NEOM to Almaty.⁹ Red Sea Global has said that the second phase of its development is being delivered through a sequenced approach, a statement made after reporting that construction would pause at the end of 2026, and in January the Minister of Finance told AFP at the World Economic Forum that some giga-projects would be scaled down and others delayed.¹⁰

The two sets of figures record both a contraction in the overall volume of work awarded and a change in the composition of what remains. Work concentrated in a small number of exceptional developments has given way to a larger volume of more conventional projects commissioned by ministries, municipalities and government-owned developers, with housing, water, transport and event infrastructure accounting for much of the pipeline.¹¹ The fiscal position has then tightened alongside that shift. The Ministry of Finance projected a deficit of 165 billion riyals for 2026 and subsequently reported a first-half shortfall of 160 billion riyals, financed in full through borrowing, so the annual projection stood close to being met at the midpoint of the year.¹² Riyadh will host Expo 2030 and the Kingdom will host the FIFA World Cup in 2034, and both carry fixed dates that the rescheduling seen elsewhere in the programme has not touched. Programmes of this kind, containing repeated building types and answering to a small number of owners, place a premium on the consistency of the process by which each project is briefed, designed and approved, because the same sequence is repeated many times over by teams that have not previously worked together.

Delivery Record and the Case for Process

The relationship between process and project outcomes in Saudi Arabia has been examined in the academic literature for some time. A survey conducted by researchers at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, drawing on responses from owners, consultants and contractors, identified seventy-three separate causes of delay and reported that 70% of the projects examined had overrun. Three quarters of the contractors surveyed, and rather more than half of the consultants, estimated the average overrun at between 10% and 30% of the original contract duration, and all three groups ranked the change order as the most common single cause.¹³ The survey dates from 2006, and the market it described was a fraction of the present one, but it continues to be used as a baseline in subsequent Saudi research and the mechanism it identified has not altered. A change order records a decision taken late, or taken and then revisited, and the expense of accommodating one increases with each stage of design and construction completed before it is raised.

Concern with the efficiency of capital projects is established at the level of the state as well as in the literature. The Council of Ministers created the Government Expenditure and Projects Efficiency Authority in February 2021, incorporating the national programme for the management, operation and maintenance of projects into what had been the Center of Spending Efficiency. The remit of the authority covers the quality of projects, assets and facilities alongside the efficiency of expenditure, and government entities working with it were reported to have realised savings above 530 billion riyals between the launch of Vision 2030 and December 2021.¹⁴ A government that has established a standing authority for this purpose has accepted the proposition on which any plan of work depends, namely that delivery outcomes follow in part from the process used to arrive at them.

The Royal Institute of British Architects

RIBA was founded in London in 1834 as the Institute of British Architects and received a Royal Charter in 1837, with supplemental charters following and a further charter granted in 1971. Chartered status is the foundation of everything else the institute does, because a chartered body sets and enforces a professional standard where a trade association represents an interest. Four of its functions account for the institute's relevance outside the United Kingdom.

The first of these is qualification, in that RIBA Chartered Membership is awarded to those who have met the institute's qualification requirements, in the United Kingdom and overseas, and remains distinct from the statutory title of architect, which in Britain is protected by the Architects Registration Board. A chartered member practising abroad takes the designation with them, and the membership in the Middle East and Africa has grown to approach one thousand in part for that reason.¹⁹

The second is education, a function the institute has exercised since it validated its first architecture course at the University of Liverpool in 1924, with 235 programmes running worldwide by the centenary of the scheme in 2024.^{15, 16} Validation proceeds by peer review, and visiting boards composed of practising architects, academics and students assess whether a course meets the standard required for exemption from the institute's own examinations. The institute validates programmes at more than fifty schools and course providers internationally as well as across the United Kingdom, so a Saudi practice may employ graduates whose qualifications were assessed against a British benchmark without any of them having studied in Britain.

The third is continuing competence across the working life of a practising architect. Chartered members anywhere in the world are required to complete and record at least thirty-five hours of continuing professional development each year, twenty of which must fall within ten mandatory core curriculum topics covering subjects from procurement and building conservation to health and safety and design technology.¹⁷ The obligation applies regardless of where a member practises, which gives the institute a standing channel into the working knowledge of its members in the Gulf.

The fourth is practice accreditation, under which a RIBA Chartered Practice must include a chartered member among its principals, place all architectural work under the supervision of a chartered architect, hold professional indemnity insurance, and maintain a quality management system, a health and safety policy, a written employment policy and a framework for continuing professional development, with annual application and a renewal audit every three years.¹⁸ The scheme extends the standard from the individual to the office, the level at which a client appoints.

Within the Kingdom the institute maintains an office in the Gulf alongside a chapter managed by its members, with country representatives for Saudi Arabia.¹⁹ The institute introduced a Middle East award in 2025 and announced nine winners on 5 November, drawn from a shortlist spanning the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Bahrain.²⁰ A suite of memoranda of understanding is also being signed with strategic partners across the Kingdom, from regulatory authorities through to major developments.

What the RIBA Plan of Work is

The framework organises a project into eight stages numbered 0 to 7, running from Strategic Definition through Preparation and Briefing, Concept Design, Spatial Coordination, Technical Design and Manufacturing and Construction to Handover and then Use. A series of task bars crosses those stages, covering the outcome of each one, the core tasks within it, the statutory processes that fall due, the procurement route, the information exchanged at each boundary, and the project strategies carried through the whole. Every stage has a single defined outcome, and the information generated during a stage is exchanged and signed off by the client before the next begins.²¹ The requirement for that signature separates the stages from a list of design phases, because a project proceeds only once the client has accepted what the previous stage produced.

The framework has been revised in step with changes in procurement and contract practice, which accounts for its survival across sixty years of use. It began in 1963 as a shared reference for architects and their clients and was taken up across the wider industry over the following decades. The revision of 2013 was substantial: the framework was rewritten to suit any form of procurement, Stage 0 was added to allow strategic consideration before a project is initiated and Stage 7 to account for the life of the completed building, and task bars were introduced for town planning, programme and procurement, the last of these recording where tendering activity falls within the design stages under each route. The edition of 2020 drew on almost seven years of feedback gathered by the institute, clarified the stage boundaries, and addressed digital delivery, modern methods of construction, professional ethics and the net zero commitments made the previous year. Procurement neutrality is stated as a principle, which leaves nothing to be inferred, and the institute's position is that a change of procurement route alters the information requirements and the programme without altering the design process itself.²¹

The Plan of Work is not a contract, a point worth establishing early. The institute describes it as guidance for the preparation of professional services and building contracts, which places it alongside whichever contract form a client selects, without competing with it. A client adopting the framework gives up nothing contractual and takes on no licensing obligation, and both the overview and the practice template are published as free downloads.

Why the framework works

The framework does not allocate work between the parties, and it sets out what the project team must achieve at each stage and leaves the question of who undertakes each task to the Responsibility Matrix prepared during Stage 1, to the Design Responsibility Matrix contained in the accompanying toolbox, and to the appointments themselves. That separation allows one framework to accommodate traditional, design and build, management and contractor-led routes without amendment. On the same principle, the deliverables described at each stage are strategic rather than comprehensive. The institute presents the stage outcomes and core tasks as summaries that are neither exhaustive nor chronological, and project teams develop the detail on each commission through scopes of service, design programmes and information requirements.²¹ A framework that specified deliverables exhaustively would have needed rewriting with every change in technology or procurement practice and would not keep pace in new environments or through new regulations.

Nine project strategies accompany the stages and are carried from briefing to completion instead of being treated as separate exercises. They cover conservation, cost, fire safety, health and safety, inclusive design, planning, handover, procurement and sustainability.²¹ Each is introduced during the early stages, developed as the design proceeds and tested at handover, so that an obligation such as conserving a heritage setting or meeting an energy target is recorded at the point where it can still shape a design, before the stage at which it has to be accommodated within one. Several of the nine correspond closely to requirements Saudi projects already carry, particularly those concerning conservation, planning, procurement and the intended use of the completed building.

Sequence is the matter on which the framework allows the least latitude: spatial coordination must conclude at Stage 3, change control procedures must be initiated at the same point, and design work must be completed within Stage 4, leaving none of it to be carried on into construction. The institute states the underlying position plainly, namely that the outcomes of one stage are not recovered in the stage that follows.²¹ When placed alongside the delay research discussed above, the practical effect becomes clearer. A change order raised during construction usually records a decision the framework would have required at Stage 2 or Stage 3, and the interval between those two points is what later appears as variation claims, extensions of time and disputed final accounts.

Scale is accommodated without alteration to the structure, since the same eight stages apply to a domestic extension and to a development costing several billion US dollars, and what varies is the volume of information exchanged at each boundary rather than the sequence itself. This matters in a market where a single client may hold a portfolio ranging from individual clinics to entire districts. The Saudi edition, discussed below, takes the principle further through a master-planning approach to the stages, under which many individual projects proceed inside one large programme with infrastructure running through it, an arrangement intended for developments that combine real estate, infrastructure and technology within a single undertaking.²²

The last of the eight stages returns the framework to its starting point, with Stage 7 covering occupation, post-occupancy evaluation and the verification of the outcomes agreed during briefing, and when a building no longer meets the requirements of the organisation using it, the process returns to Stage 0 and to the question of whether a new building is needed at all. Dale Sinclair of WSP, a leading figure in the adaptation of the framework for the region, has identified that circularity, and the way it connects design and delivery through to use, as one of the features the Saudi guide sets out to demonstrate.²³

Overlays and the extension of the framework

The institute publishes overlays instead of expanding the core document each time a new subject is identified. An overlay takes a single subject and maps it across the eight stages, identifying which decisions belong at which point and whose input is needed to make them. Each is prepared with industry partners and published without charge, and none alters the stage structure. Specialist content is therefore added to the framework without fragmenting it, and a project team can then satisfy several specialist requirements at once against one sequence.

Six overlays are currently in circulation. The second edition of the Design for Manufacture and Assembly Overlay, published in November 2021, gives guidance on seven categories of modern methods of construction. The remaining five cover Passivhaus in February 2023, security in April of that year, inclusive design in July 2023, engagement in January 2024 and smart buildings in February 2024.²⁴ Earlier overlays addressed sustainability in 2011 and building information modelling in 2012, subjects the 2020 edition now carries within the core framework as ordinary stage business and no longer as specialist additions. That absorption is itself instructive, in that an overlay may serve as a preliminary vehicle for material later brought into the framework proper once the industry has caught up with it.

A jurisdiction can be mapped by the same mechanism as a technical subject, and the value of that mechanism to Saudi Arabia follows from the point. A Saudi overlay has a defined body of national requirement to record against the eight stages. Building code compliance and the approvals attaching to it fall at identifiable points in the design sequence. Permitting, design review and inspection are administered through the municipalities and the Balady platform, and each has a moment at which submission is due. The Saudi Architecture design guidelines are enforced through planning and permitting, so the regional character and typology selected for a scheme must be fixed before a submission is drawn rather than adjusted after one is rejected. Local content obligations and the requirement to engage licensed engineering offices have an impact on procurement and on the drafting of appointment scopes. Client gateways operated by developers, ministries and funders need a common reference before reporting across a portfolio can mean very much. Recording each of these against a stage converts a set of separate obligations into a sequence, and does so without amending the framework, the building code or the requirements themselves.

The framework among the alternatives

Comparing the RIBA framework with contract suites or with bodies of project management knowledge yields little, because those instruments answer different questions. The comparison published in the institute's own overview is more informative, setting the eight stages against plans of work used elsewhere. The European framework issued by ACE moves from an initiative stage through four design

stages to construction, building use and end of life, and is the closest in scope to the British model. The American Institute of Architects sequence covers schematic design, design development, construction documents and construction, with no pre-design stage and no coverage after completion. The framework maintained by the Association for Project Management proceeds from strategy through outcome definition, feasibility and two design stages to delivery, project close and benefits realisation. NATSPEC in Australia moves from establishment through concept design, schematic design and design development to contract documentation, construction and facility management, while the New Zealand Construction Industry Council carries four design stages before construction and operation. The South African model reaches from inception to close out with no in-use stage, and the Spanish and Russian models turn on two design submissions tied to statutory approval.²¹

There are four key differences that separate these documents. Some incorporate tendering into the stages while others remain agnostic as to procurement. The number of design stages varies from two to four, so that concept design in one tradition covers a different quantity of work from concept design in another. Briefing is seldom treated as a discipline in its own right, including the prior question of whether a building is required. Coverage rarely extends past construction into the use of the completed asset, which is the period during which the performance agreed at briefing is tested.²¹ A Saudi client appointing a British architect, a Korean contractor and an American cost consultant to the same commission is appointing three different sets of assumptions on each of those four points unless the appointment documents say otherwise.

On information management there is no competition to resolve, since the 2013 edition of the Plan of Work was developed alongside PAS 1192-2, which took effect on 28 February 2013 and became the basis of BS EN ISO 19650.²⁵ The international standard governs how project information is managed, and the Plan of Work governs the point in the process at which that information is produced and exchanged. Research at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals records a digital transformation initiative launched in January 2024 that requires building information modelling for architectural plans on building projects, with engineering offices submitting three-dimensional design models to the ministry responsible for municipalities and housing,²⁶ and building SMART Saudi Arabia was admitted as a chapter in formation in July 2024.²⁷

What Saudi Arabia has standardised, and what it has not

The Kingdom has moved a considerable distance towards standardising what a building is obliged to achieve. The 2024 edition of the Saudi Building Code became mandatory on 30 June 2025 after a transitional period of 180 days, replacing the edition of 2018.^{28, 29} The National Committee responsible for the code was transformed into the Saudi Building Code Center by Council of Ministers Decision No 656 of 4 March 2025, with administrative authority moving from the Saudi Standards, Metrology and Quality Organization to the Ministry of Municipalities and Housing, formerly the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and Housing, and Council of Ministers Decision No 286 of 9 October 2024 had already amended Article 9 of the implementation law so that the occupancy certificate became a condition of the full activation of electrical supply.^{29, 30} Permitting, design review and inspection are administered through the municipalities and the Balady platform, with licensed engineering offices preparing the drawings on which approval depends.

A second body of requirement concerns architectural identity rather than technical performance. The Saudi Architecture Characters Map, launched on 16 March 2025 by the Crown Prince as chairman of the Supreme Committee for Saudi Architectural Design Guidelines, establishes nineteen architectural characters drawn from the geography and building traditions of the Kingdom, each carrying traditional, transitional and contemporary typologies.³¹ Application is mandatory and proceeds in phases. The first phase covered major, government, commercial and residential villa projects in Al-Ahsa, Taif and Abha, and all buildings in Makkah,³² and by the fourth phase the guidelines extended to cities and governorates in the Riyadh, Makkah, Northern Borders and Tabuk regions.³³ The Royal Commission for Riyadh City began applying architectural and urban design guidelines across the central commercial corridor of the capital in June 2026, resuming the issue of development permits in the same zone as it did so.³⁴ Professional entry is regulated by the Saudi Council of Engineers, established in 2002 and operating under the ministry, which licenses engineering offices and classifies engineers across four professional grades.³⁵

What has not been standardised is the route a project team takes between the brief and the handover. Developers and ministries operate internal stage gates whose definitions differ from one entity to the next and sometimes between projects held by the same entity. The consequence appears in the documents rather than in the buildings, in appointment scopes that describe stages by different names, in payment milestones that fall at different points in the design, and in portfolio reporting that compares figures drawn from different definitions. That is the gap a plan of work is intended to fill, and closing it is the purpose of the Saudi edition.

The Saudi edition

The overlay mechanism described above has now been applied to a country instead of to a subject, in the form of the KSA Plan of Work, referred to in some of the published material as the KSA Overlay, which aligns the framework with Saudi regulatory process, procurement practice and localisation policy. The guide is due to be launched formally in Riyadh at the Saudi Mega Projects conference held from 28 to 30 September 2026, though the framework has been in circulation and under discussion within the market for some months, with the institute setting out its content and intent publicly since the spring.^{22, 23} Sinclair has described the position it takes towards the frameworks already in use in the Kingdom. His account holds that there are no fundamental differences between delivering a project in the United Kingdom and delivering one in Saudi Arabia, and that the differences which do exist concern the international composition of the consulting firms at work, the way municipalities handle the regulatory process and the information issued during procurement. The Saudi guide accordingly maps a number of the frameworks used to manage programmes and projects across the Kingdom and notes where they correspond to one another.²³

Valerie Vaughan-Dick, chief executive of the institute, has described the problem the guide addresses in terms that correspond closely to the experience of assembling a Saudi project team. In the United Kingdom the construction industry matured alongside the framework across six decades of common use. In Saudi Arabia, professionals arrive from every major market and continue to follow the processes of the countries in which they trained, which produces sound systems on individual projects and confusion across a portfolio, with handover points and reporting lines becoming indistinct where several projects and several stakeholders meet.²² The remedy proposed is a standalone process document

developed around the particular characteristics of the Kingdom and the projects being delivered within it.

Three features of the Saudi edition are relevant to any decision to adopt it. The first is that the stage definitions are held identical to the United Kingdom version, so practitioners already working to the framework encounter nothing unfamiliar and the eight-stage structure is retained. The master-planning approach described earlier forms the second, allowing a programme to be managed as a whole while its constituent projects proceed at different rates. The third is that the guide identifies roles used in Saudi practice, among them the architect of record and the design guardian, explaining how each relates to the lead designer and lead consultant roles established in British practice, alongside the deliverables and information requirements particular to the Kingdom.²² Vaughan-Dick stated in the spring that, following the launch of the guide, a localised training programme built around it would begin in June 2026, intended to serve localisation targets and to function as an onboarding and annual refresher tool within organisations, and Sinclair has described the same course as a means of developing understanding of the Plan of Work among built environment professionals in government and the private sector.^{22, 23}

On industrialised construction the guide takes a position of its own, treating design for manufacture and assembly as a process in its own right, distinct from designing for traditional construction, and setting out the expectation that standardisation will spread as more work transfers from site to factory, with delivery periods and costs falling as it does. Sinclair reports demand for greater standardisation among clients across the region.²³ Vaughan-Dick argues that a defined structure with appropriate deliverables and sign-off procedures retains professional judgement at the point of decision as artificial intelligence enters design workflows, rather than allowing the tools to occupy that position.²²

What the Overlay changes on a Saudi project

The clearest effect falls on the point in the process at which decisions are fixed. Stage 0 requires the client to establish whether a building is the appropriate means of meeting the requirement at all, supported by a business case, a project budget and a review of project risks, before any expenditure on design is committed. Stage 1 requires confirmation that the brief can be accommodated on the site and within the budget before design begins. Set against the finding that change orders lead the Saudi delay tables, the value of those two tests lies in their position in the sequence, because a requirement identified at Stage 1 is resolved in discussion while the same requirement identified during construction is resolved through a variation.

Consultants and contractors on Saudi projects are drawn from the United Kingdom, Europe, the United States, Korea, Japan, China and the Gulf, and each arrives with the plan of work of the market that trained them. A shared set of stage definitions removes the ambiguity over what concept design or detailed design means inside an appointment, a programme or a payment certificate, and gives developers, ministries and funders one basis on which to define approval gateways and report progress across a portfolio. The benefit grows with the number of projects held, so the framework suits a client body running many schemes at once more than a client building once.

Procurement practice in the Kingdom is mixed, and any framework applied across it has to accommodate that. Traditional construction-only procurement remains the most common route, design

and build has been increasing, and engineering, procurement and construction contracting predominates in energy and industrial work.³⁶ The procurement task bar records the point at which the construction team joins under each of those routes while the design stages hold their shape, so a client is never forced to choose between a coherent design process and the procurement route a project needs.

Requirements enforced at the permit counter are reached earlier in the process. The regional design characters are applied through planning and permitting, and schemes in heritage settings such as Diriyah and AlUla face design review at an early point in their development. Requirements of that kind are inexpensive when they enter the process at Stage 1 as part of the project strategies, and expensive when they arrive at a submission already drawn, coordinated and priced. Something similar applies to the information requirements following from the modelling initiative, though the position here is more qualified. Sinclair holds that clients should consider their information requirements at each stage, and that professional fees should be scoped to include the preparation of that information, while accepting that the right solution is difficult to determine at the outset when handover lies years away. On his account, topics such as IT infrastructure and data requirements can be settled early even where final software selections are made closer to handover, and the introduction of Stage 7 assists the process by acknowledging the connection between the capital and operational phases of a project.²³

The life of the completed asset falls inside the project itself, a distinction that matters in a country where Expo 2030 and the World Cup of 2034 will add venues and supporting infrastructure to an operational estate whose running costs will be incurred over a far longer period than its capital costs. The Handover Strategy sets measurable targets during briefing and Stage 7 provides for their verification in use through post-occupancy evaluation, which allows a second project to be informed by the performance of the first. For a client delivering housing or clinics at volume across many similar schemes, that difference accumulates with every subsequent project. The institute set out further guidance on handover in the RIBA Plan for Use Guide, published in March 2021, which details the activities required at each stage to keep a design on course to meet the targets agreed at briefing.³⁷

Local content obligations and the requirement to engage licensed engineering offices create demand for structured process training, and a written framework supported by published templates and a toolbox can be taught in a way undocumented custom cannot. This means that training and knowledge transfer acquire a documented basis, and knowledge transferred through a shared process remains available after the appointment through which it arrived has ended, which is the distinction between capability retained within the Kingdom and capability that leaves with the consultant.

A further consequence falls on the financing of projects, at a point when Saudi policy has been moving towards a larger role for private and foreign capital in the delivery of Vision 2030. The then investment minister, Khalid Al-Falih, told the Future Investment Initiative in Riyadh in October 2025 that the giga-projects had been drawing heavily on government resources, and urged local and foreign investors to step in.³⁸ Lenders, insurers and joint venture partners assess the governance of a project alongside its design, and the documentary output of the framework, consisting of a stage report at each boundary with a defined information exchange to accompany it, supplies material of the kind due diligence requires. A client able to show that a project has passed through recorded gateways stands in a stronger position with an investment committee than one relying on an assurance that the design is complete.

Potential Limits of the Argument

The first potential limit is that of clear quantitative evidence that adopting a plan of work reduces overruns on Saudi projects. This is based on no clearly published studies supporting this thinking, however, the observation that late decisions are expensive and that a staged process fixes decisions earlier, which is consistent with wider delay literature, would suggest that while there may not be quantitative evidence, there is logical thought that a plan of work would be beneficial.

The second potential limit to the argument concerns the reach of the benefits of a plan of work. The Saudi delay literature identifies causes well outside any design-stage framework, and studies of government-funded building projects rank the financial difficulties of contractors, delays by owners in making progress payments, the award of contracts to the lowest bidder and shortages of manpower among the most significant risks to completion, with one study noting that the time taken to issue labour visas for non-national workers is a cause particular to the Kingdom.^{39, 40, 41} The events of 2026 have added to that list. The conflict involving Iran, which began in late February 2026, and the consequent disruption to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz have produced supply chain interruption, cost escalation, workforce displacement and the withdrawal of insurance cover, with force majeure and hardship notices issued on projects throughout the Kingdom. The Saudi Centre for Commercial Arbitration recorded 182 new filings in 2025, an increase of 63% on the previous year, of which construction and engineering disputes accounted for 47.3%, and the volume is expected to rise further.⁹ A plan of work governs coordination between parties, design error and the timing of client decisions. It has nothing to say about procurement policy, payment behaviour, labour supply or the disruption of maritime freight, and a client adopting one while leaving those matters untouched should expect a partial improvement rather than a decisive one.

Conclusion

The choice of a process framework is distinct from the choice of a contract form and from the choice of a building code, and the three operate at different levels of the same project. Saudi Arabia has settled the second and the third with some determination over the past two years, through a mandatory building code, a dedicated code centre, municipal permitting platforms, a national design charter applied city by city and a regulated professional register. The first has generally been left to whichever consultant prepared the documents, with the result that two projects owned by the same client and built under the same code may be run through entirely different sequences of decision and approval.

The RIBA Plan of Work offers a structure that has retained its form across sixty years of procurement reform, digital delivery and environmental regulation, and whose overview and template are published as free downloads. The Saudi edition records national requirements against its stages without altering them, retains the eight-stage structure practitioners already know, and adds the roles, deliverables and information requirements the Kingdom uses. Adoption would call for no amendment to the Saudi Building Code, to the Government Tenders and Procurement Law or to any existing contract form, which makes the decision one for clients and their advisers alone. The case is strongest for clients commissioning repeated projects without an established internal framework, and weakest where a mature system already runs to the satisfaction of the organisation using it. For British practices already working to the framework, and for Saudi clients assembling teams drawn from many national traditions, a shared set of stage definitions removes an ambiguity that serves neither party.

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