

Executive Summary

PARSUK renewed its protocol with the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) for 2024–26, launching an innovative scientific diplomacy programme between Portugal and the United Kingdom (UK). This report outlines the main activities and results from the first phase, running from September 2024 to January 2025. PARSUK's scientific diplomacy programme, developed with the support of Science Diplomacy Advisors (SDAs), rests on two pillars: **Science Policy and Advice**, and **Partnerships**.

Science Policy and Advice

This pillar aims to shape a shared science and innovation agenda for Portugal and the UK, building formal communication links and mechanisms for science policy advice. The main activities under this pillar include:

Systematic Process for Information Mobilisation

The SDAs created a comprehensive model for PARSUK's knowledge management, using systems thinking tools to map 18 stakeholder types, 6 thematic categories, and 8 communication tools. This strategic model underpins future planning and resource allocation in scientific diplomacy for PARSUK, covering current and future activities and the wider scientific diplomacy landscape. It establishes content focus and communication methods tailored for different audiences.

Information Gathering Mechanisms

The team implemented an information gathering system with both passive and active mechanisms. Passive mechanisms include newsletter and mailing list subscriptions from key science and innovation institutions, and policy updates in the UK and beyond. Active mechanisms centre on direct engagement with institutions and experts through the Scientific Council and PARSUK's wider stakeholder network.

Scientific Telegram

PARSUK's Scientific Telegram stands out as a ground-breaking initiative in Portugal. The Telegram is a document PARSUK shares regularly with the Portuguese Ambassador to the UK, covering relevant developments in the UK's science and innovation landscape. Produced regularly by the SDAs with support from PARSUK's Scientific Council, the Telegram is then distributed by the Embassy to relevant Portuguese institutions through diplomatic channels. During the reporting period, the team produced and delivered the first two Scientific Telegrams (December 2024 and January 2025), which received strong positive feedback from Portuguese public authorities and diplomatic bodies. This innovation establishes a direct line between PARSUK and the Portuguese diplomatic mission, marking a milestone in national scientific diplomacy.

Partnerships

This pillar drives bi- and multilateral cooperation by facilitating collaborations and identifying institutions, models, and opportunities for new partnerships. Key activities carried out during the reporting period include:

Strategic Approach

The SDAs defined a strategic approach to deliver the partnerships pillar based on three elements: identifying key institutions and stakeholders in Portugal and the UK for bilateral partnerships in science and innovation; analysing potential collaboration models drawn from existing initiatives and

international best practice; and clarifying PARSUK's role in establishing and managing partnership programmes.

Possible Collaboration Models between Portugal and the United Kingdom

The team investigated a range of partnership models for science and innovation and consulted with experts, identifying seven types of possible models for bilateral cooperation, including 'rigid' models (formal agreements between institutions) and 'soft' models (not requiring formal new arrangements). Of these, joint doctoral programmes offered the highest potential by promoting formal partnerships between institutions and supporting long-term collaboration with co-supervision and researcher mobility. However, implementing these programmes presents significant challenges, including the complexity of establishing dual and joint degrees, high administrative costs post-Brexit, and Portugal institutions' perceived lack of appeal to the UK's top universities.

Mapping of Strategic Areas and Champions

At the request of the Portuguese Government and FCT, the team mapped priority subject areas for Portugal-UK scientific partnerships by reviewing key strategy documents and consulting stakeholders. High potential subjects include Climate Change, Clean Energy, Life Sciences, and Digital and AI Technologies. PARSUK also identified 63 academics in the UK who could serve as Portugal's champions in their institutions. PARSUK shared this mapping with Portuguese authorities, providing valuable information for starting and delivering bilateral partnerships.

Reflections

The pilot phase demonstrated the importance of maintaining SDAs as a dedicated and remunerated professional resource. The programme achieved notable success in engaging Portuguese policy-makers and institutions, responding rapidly to requests from the Government and FCT. PARSUK established new relationships with various bodies, including the Diplomatic Institute, AICEP, and associations of diaspora researchers. With a strategic scientific diplomacy programme and clear medium- and long-term priorities, PARSUK now has new tools to continue to deliver demonstrable impact and concrete progress. The main challenge lies in ensuring long-term sustainability, as external funding dependence makes resources precarious and threatens high-impact initiatives.

Next Steps

PARSUK's immediate priorities involve refining systematic processes for information collection and sharing, delivering the Scientific Telegram regularly, following up with Portuguese authorities on strategic area mapping and champions, and broadening cooperation with scientific diplomacy partners in other countries and diaspora associations. The team also intends to develop a more permanent scientific diplomacy model, working together with the Embassy and the Portuguese authorities.

The report also outlines an ambitious and comprehensive medium- and long-term activity programme for PARSUK to cement its role in scientific diplomacy, strengthen its policy and collaboration pillars, and contribute ever more significantly to the Portuguese science diplomacy mission.