
UK-Tunisia Higher Education Partnerships: A Roadmap for Entrepreneurship and Innovation

October 2025

Contents

Foreword.....	4
Acknowledgments.....	5
Executive summary.....	6
Introduction.....	8
Background.....	8
1. Tunisian context.....	10
1.1 Economic context.....	10
1.2 The higher education sector.....	10
1.3 Graduate employability.....	11
1.4 Foundations for international academic partnerships.....	12
2. Tunisia-UK higher education collaboration in enterprise and entrepreneurship.....	13
2.1 Strategic recognition of entrepreneurship.....	14
2.2 Institutional and policy-level collaboration.....	15
2.3 Capacity building and knowledge exchange.....	15
2.4 Academic collaboration and research exchange.....	16
2.5 Enterprise for regional development.....	16
3. Transnational Education Sustainability Framework.....	16
4. Entrepreneurial partnership initiatives.....	18
4.1 Establish UK-Tunisia enterprise centre partnerships.....	18
4.2 Study visits and visiting scholars.....	20
4.3 Professional recognition and leadership programmes.....	21
4.4 Collaborative research opportunities.....	22
4.5 Supporting the growth of technology transfer.....	23
4.6 Student exchange programmes.....	23
4.7 Real-time student collaboration.....	24
4.8 University recognition and profile.....	25
4.9 Health innovation testbeds.....	26
4.10 Knowledge transfer partnerships in agri-tech.....	27
4.11 Innovation consultancies/business clinics.....	29
Annex 1: NCEE Entrepreneurial University Award – Overview, Process and Impact.....	30
Annex 2: Proposed activities by sector.....	32
Health.....	32
Agriculture, Agritech and Agribusiness.....	35



Business Clinics/Innovation Consultancies37

About NCEE.....40

About the British Council.....40

Foreword

At the British Council, our work in higher education is rooted in building trust-based partnerships that support national priorities and unlock international opportunities. In Tunisia, we are proud to be working alongside the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the British Embassy, universities, and strategic partners to strengthen institutional capacity, foster innovation, and promote collaboration that contributes to sustainable development. Since 2018, the British Council has been a founding member of the Tunisia-United Kingdom Joint Commission for Higher Education and Scientific Research: a bilateral platform established to enhance cooperation between the two countries in higher education governance, mobility, employability, and applied research. The Commission has helped shape a shared vision of how higher education can address common challenges and drive long-term impact. In particular, we have developed dynamic partnerships between UK and Tunisian experts to develop quality assurance frameworks, enterprise initiatives and transnational education strategies which, along with a growing number of scholarships, will further cement the relationship between our two countries.

The initiatives outlined in this report align closely with that vision and reflect the depth and potential of UK–Tunisia collaboration. Our ability to bring together local ambition with global expertise is central to our approach, and this report reflects those values in action.

This report comes at a pivotal moment in Tunisia’s higher education development journey. As the country advances its Vision 2030 goals, higher education is playing an increasingly strategic role in promoting inclusive growth, regional development, and graduate employability. The report offers timely insight into how partnerships between UK and Tunisian institutions, particularly in entrepreneurship, research, and innovation, can contribute meaningfully to this national agenda. It highlights practical models for collaboration grounded in trust, reciprocity, and long-term value, reaffirming the vital role of higher education in addressing shared challenges, creating opportunities, and fostering innovation through international cooperation.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, and in particular to the Director of International Cooperation, for their invaluable support and insightful contributions. I would also like to extend special appreciation to the Renovation Department, whose efforts have fostered a truly collegial and enabling environment that has greatly facilitated this collaboration.

Ultimately, it provides a strategic roadmap for deepening UK–Tunisia collaboration in ways that benefit both nations’ economies, higher education institutions, and future generations of entrepreneurs.

Jill Coates

Country Director Tunisia

Acknowledgements

This report was commissioned by the British Council and developed by the National Centre for Entrepreneurship in Education (NCEE).

Special thanks to members of the Global Alliance of Entrepreneurial Universities who provided valuable input to this report, particularly the universities of Manouba and Sousse in Tunisia, and Anglia Ruskin University, Harper Adams University and Liverpool John Moores University in the UK.

NCEE project team

Ceri Nursaw

James Ransom

British Council project team

Hayfa Kebsi

Nesma Mostafa

Susanna Carmody

Executive summary

This report presents a comprehensive framework for enhancing UK-Tunisia higher education collaboration in entrepreneurship and innovation, commissioned by the British Council in collaboration with Tunisia's Ministry of Higher Education, and developed by the National Centre for Entrepreneurship in Education (NCEE). Building upon seven years of established collaboration between NCEE and Tunisian institutions, it draws on detailed consultations with leaders and academics from nine universities across both countries.

The research identifies significant opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships within Tunisia's evolving higher education landscape. Despite economic challenges, Tunisia demonstrates considerable strengths that provide a foundation for international collaboration. The country has strategically invested in developing a knowledge-based economy, with particular emphasis on STEM fields, agriculture, medical sciences, and finance. With approximately 315,000 students enrolled in tertiary education in 2023-24 and a gross enrolment rate of over 38%, Tunisia has seen steady growth in student enrolment in tertiary education since 2000, supported by sustained government investment. The average annual increase of around 3.3% reflects the country's long-term commitment to expanding access and strengthening its higher education system.

Tunisia's higher education sector demonstrates several distinctive assets for international partnership, including substantial research output in medicine, health sciences, biochemistry/genetics, agriculture, and computer science. The increasing prevalence of English-taught programmes facilitates collaboration with anglophone institutions, while the country's commitment to entrepreneurship is evidenced through initiatives such as the Startup Act (2018) and university-based incubator hubs. Tunisia also demonstrates growing openness to transnational education as a capacity-building mechanism.

Structured through the British Council's Transnational Education Sustainability Framework,¹ which identifies five interconnected pillars for sustainable partnerships (mutual benefits, financial viability, partnership breadth and depth, leadership and people development, and mutual trust and communication), this report proposes eleven strategic partnership initiatives:

1. Enterprise centre partnerships: Establishing twinning arrangements between UK and Tunisian university enterprise centres, focusing on local economic needs and creating pathways to global markets, including for female entrepreneurs
2. Study visits and visiting scholars: Enhancing international outlook through structured academic exchanges, emphasising knowledge transfer and collaborative teaching
3. Professional recognition and leadership programmes: Developing comprehensive frameworks to recognise and reward entrepreneurial contributions among university staff
4. Collaborative research opportunities: Leveraging international funding mechanisms to co-create knowledge addressing shared challenges

¹ <https://opportunities-insight.britishcouncil.org/download/data/49460/21074>
<https://opportunities-insight.britishcouncil.org/>

-
5. Technology transfer support: Bridging the gap between Tunisia's research output and commercialisation through structured collaboration
 6. Student exchange programmes: Designing thematic mobility schemes aligned with shared national priorities
 7. Real-time student collaboration: Implementing challenge-based digital platforms connecting students across borders
 8. University recognition frameworks: Utilising structured awards to benchmark progress and incentivise innovation
 9. Health innovation testbeds: Establishing environments for trialling new technologies and healthcare models
 10. Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) in agriculture: Adapting the UK's KTP model to support agricultural innovation
 11. Innovation consultancies/business clinics: Creating student-led consultancy services for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and startups

These initiatives focus on three thematic areas – health, agriculture, and business – where both countries demonstrate complementary strengths and shared interests. Each proposed programme emphasises sustainable development, equitable knowledge exchange, and clear pathways to implementation.

The successful implementation of these recommendations requires coordinated action from multiple stakeholders, including government ministries, higher education institutions, funding bodies, and industry partners. This framework offers a strategic roadmap for enhancing UK-Tunisia collaboration in higher education, leveraging entrepreneurship and innovation to address shared challenges and create sustainable partnerships that benefit both nations' economies, educational institutions, and future generations of entrepreneurs.

Introduction

NCEE was commissioned by the British Council to ‘provide a comprehensive framework for enhancing UK-Tunisia higher education collaboration in entrepreneurship and innovation.’

The intention from the British Council is that ‘by focusing on these strategic areas, both countries can leverage their strengths to create sustainable partnerships that benefit their economies, educational institutions, and future generations of entrepreneurs.’

This report builds on a seven-year collaboration between Tunisia and NCEE which has focused on further building innovation and entrepreneurship within higher education. It was commissioned in light of universities in Tunisia seeking accreditation of the Entrepreneurial University Award. It is based on knowledge and experience gained to date, alongside detailed conversations with leaders and academics from four universities in the UK and five universities in Tunisia.

Background

The entrepreneurial universities collaboration between Tunisia and NCEE is a key initiative emerging from the Tunisia-United Kingdom Joint Commission for Higher Education and Scientific Research. The Commission was jointly established in June 2018 by the British Embassy, the British Council, and the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to foster cooperation and enhance higher education strategies between the two nations.

NCEE, a founding member of the Commission, has played a significant role in the development of assessment and training mechanisms designed to foster entrepreneurial practices within higher education institutions. Between January and March 2022, NCEE conducted a series of workshops tailored for academics and staff in Tunisia to enhance their understanding and implementation of entrepreneurial education within their curricula.

Building on these initial efforts, in 2023 the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research engaged in discussions with NCEE, centring on Tunisia’s need to develop a national policy for fostering entrepreneurial and innovative universities. This resulted in a dissemination of the Entrepreneurial University Award accreditation framework across all Tunisian higher education institutions in collaboration with the Directorate General for University Renovation (DGRU). The Tunisian Ministry expressed its commitment to integrating this accreditation culture into the national university system. Following this, Manouba University piloted the Entrepreneurial University accreditation process, leveraging British expertise to guide the development of the portfolio. This pilot programme was intended to serve as a model for subsequent implementation in other Tunisian universities, expanding the impact of the initiative nationwide.

Employability and innovation remain key priority areas within the Commission’s agenda, with NCEE actively contributing to discussions on increasing the employment rate of Tunisian graduates. This area aligns with one of the four thematic priorities outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Tunisian and UK governments, under which the British Council is designated to provide technical assistance.

Under the British Council’s Going Global Partnerships programme, work in employability and innovation is jointly led by the DGRU and NCEE. The project’s design and development were informed by the strategic priorities of the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education, the objectives of <https://opportunities-insight.britishcouncil.org/>

the Going Global Partnerships programme, and NCEE's capacity to deliver comprehensive support. NCEE's established network of universities, its participation in the Global Alliance of Entrepreneurial Universities, and its status as a member of the Commission positioned it as an ideal partner for this initiative.

Report sections

The report is organised into four sections as follows:

Section 1 explores the Tunisian context, examining the country's economic challenges and opportunities, higher education system, governance structures, quality improvement initiatives, research strengths, entrepreneurial ecosystem development, and increasing openness to transnational education partnerships.

Section 2 presents background to UK-Tunisia higher education collaboration in enterprise and entrepreneurship.

Section 3 introduces the British Council's Transnational Education Sustainability Framework, which identifies five interconnected pillars for sustainable partnerships and serves as a valuable basis for developing UK-Tunisia partnerships.

Section 4 outlines eight potential entrepreneurial partnership initiatives between UK and Tunisian institutions focusing on three thematic areas (health, agriculture, and business), including enterprise centre partnerships, knowledge exchange programmes, research collaborations, student engagement, recognition frameworks, transnational education partnerships, health innovation testbeds, and agriculture/business innovation support.

All proposals have emerged from conversations between UK and Tunisian universities, including the University of Manouba, University of Sousse, University of Jendouba, University of Tunis, University of Carthage, and the University of Leeds, as well as Liverpool John Moores University, Anglia Ruskin University, and Harper Adams University. These proposals have all been enthusiastically endorsed.

1. Tunisian context

1.1 Economic context

Tunisia presents a complex landscape of economic opportunities amid ongoing reform efforts that shape potential collaboration with UK universities. Following a period of sluggish economic performance, with growth stagnating at approximately 0% in 2023 before rebounding slightly to 1.4% in 2024, the country faces persistently high unemployment rates of around 16% overall, with youth unemployment exceeding 30%. This challenging economic environment has prompted the government to pursue fiscal and structural reforms aimed at restoring stability and stimulating investment. These include reducing the fiscal deficit and public debt through tax reforms and better-targeted subsidies, restraining the public sector wage bill, and overhauling state-owned enterprises as urged by the IMF.² Improving the business climate remains a top government priority.

Despite these constraints, Tunisia offers notable strengths that create promising opportunities for international collaboration. The country is strategically investing in developing a knowledge-based economy, with particular emphasis on STEM fields, agriculture, medical sciences, and finance as priority areas.³

In the agricultural sector, Tunisia's focus on improving productivity and sustainability presents significant collaboration potential in areas such as biotechnology for drought-resistant crops, precision agriculture techniques, and sustainable water management systems.

The health sector demonstrates considerable research strength, with approximately 22% of Tunisia's research publications focused on medicine and health sciences, opening avenues for partnerships in biomedical research, healthcare innovation, and pharmaceutical development.⁴

In the business domain, Tunisia has implemented notable initiatives like the Startup Act (2018), which provides tax exemptions, seed funding, and other incentives to foster entrepreneurial activity, particularly in high-growth sectors.⁵ The government's support for innovation has cultivated a dynamic tech startup ecosystem, with the IT industry now contributing approximately 7% of GDP and supporting over 100,000 jobs.⁶

Tunisia's strategic location bridging Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, combined with its young, well-educated workforce, further enhances its appeal as a collaborative partner for UK institutions.

1.2 The higher education sector

Tunisia's higher education system operates predominantly through public institutions, though with a growing private segment. The system comprises 13 public universities (often umbrellas for several higher education institutions) and a network of 25 Higher Institutes of Technological

² <https://www.lloydsbanktrade.com/en/market-potential/tunisia/economical-context>

³ https://www.icmedproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/WP4_POLICY-BRIEF_TUNISIA.pdf

⁴ https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/he_tunisia_2019.pdf

⁵ https://startup.gov.tn/en/startup_act/discover

⁶ <https://www.nucamp.co/blog/coding-bootcamp-tunisia-tun-inside-tunisias-thriving-tech-hub-startups-and-success-stories>

Studies, all governed by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The private university sector has expanded significantly, growing from 39 institutions in 2010 to 80 in 2023-24, offering additional capacity and specialised programmes.^{7 8}

Governance remains largely centralised through the Ministry, though a notable development was the establishment of an independent Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation (ATEA) in 2022 to enhance quality assurance across universities.⁹

Enrolment in tertiary education is robust by regional standards, with approximately 315,000 students enrolled in the 2023-24 academic year, 64% of whom were female. Of these, 266,837 were enrolled in public institutions and 48,357 in private institutions, including around 9,000 international students in both sectors.¹⁰ This represents significant growth from just 17,000 university students in 1975, though current policy emphasis has shifted from expansion to quality enhancement.¹¹

As of 2023, Tunisia's gross tertiary education enrolment rate stands at approximately 38%, marking the highest level recorded to date. This figure represents the proportion of individuals enrolled in tertiary education relative to the population of the age group. The data reflects a consistent upward trend in Tunisia's higher education participation over the past decades. Historically, Tunisia's tertiary enrolment has seen significant growth. In 1973, the enrolment rate was a mere 2.33%, indicating substantial progress over the past five decades. Regarding gender-specific data, in 2023 the gross enrolment rate for women in tertiary education in Tunisia was 49%, as opposed to 27% for men, highlighting the significant growth in female participation in tertiary education.¹²

1.3 Graduate employability

Improving educational quality and relevance constitutes a primary priority for Tunisia's higher education sector, driven by the pressing need to address graduate employability challenges. The country has implemented reforms to modernise curricula and better align university programmes with labour market demands.¹³

Tunisia adopted the Bologna "LMD" system (Licence-Master-Doctorate) in the 2000s and continues to update courses to meet international standards. Recent initiatives emphasise strengthening academia-industry linkages through internships, entrepreneurship training, and collaborative research.¹⁴

Digital transformation efforts are also underway, supported by a significant World Bank project approved in February 2025. This US\$100 million initiative aims to strengthen higher education and boost employability by enhancing degree programmes in high-demand fields, modernising

⁷ <https://agya.info/publications/books-articles/higher-education-in-tunisia-challenges-and-opportunities>

⁸ https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/he_tunisia_2019.pdf

⁹ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/news-events/news/qaa-signs-mou-with-tunisian-agency>

¹⁰ https://www.mes.tn/page.php?code_menu=14&code_menu_parent=13

¹¹ <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/reports/tunisia/2016-report/economy/covering-new-ground-the-private-sector-is-creating-more-opportunities-for-investors>

¹² <https://databrowser.uis.unesco.org/>

¹³ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2025/02/28/world-bank-approves-us-100-million-project-to-strengthen-higher-education-and-boost-employability-in-tunisia>

¹⁴ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2025/02/28/world-bank-approves-us-100-million-project-to-strengthen-higher-education-and-boost-employability-in-tunisia>

campuses, and fostering employer partnerships.¹⁵ By 2030, the project aims to have 85 accredited programmes and support at least 145,000 students and faculty members.

1.4 Foundations for international academic partnerships

Tunisia's higher education sector demonstrates several strengths that provide a foundation for international academic partnerships.

Tunisian universities have significant research output in specific fields, particularly medicine and health sciences, biochemistry/genetics, agriculture, and computer science. This disciplinary strength creates natural opportunities for UK universities to engage in joint research projects in these domains. Interestingly, the UK remains relatively under-engaged in Tunisian research partnerships, ranking only ninth in co-publications, suggesting significant potential for expanded cooperation.¹⁶

English-taught programmes are increasingly common, and there is growing interest in improving English language proficiency among students and faculty, which facilitates collaboration with anglophone institutions. However, Tunisia's performance in the 2024 EF English Proficiency Index remains relatively low, ranking 66th out of 116 countries.¹⁷

In the regional context, Tunisia performs relatively well on many education indicators, though global rankings indicate room for improvement. The country has achieved a notable expansion in tertiary enrolment, with the gross enrolment rate rising from just 2.6% in 1974 to approximately 38% by 2023.¹⁸ However, quality and outcome measures continue to lag behind international benchmarks. The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index 2017-18 ranked Tunisia relatively low on certain dimensions – 103rd for higher education quality and 106th for university-industry Research & Development (R&D) collaboration out of 137 nations.¹⁹ In global university rankings, Tunisian institutions are gradually establishing their presence. For example, Université de Tunis El Manar is ranked in the 731–740 bracket in the QS World University Rankings 2026 out of 1,501 institutions, and in the 801–1,000 global range placing it among the top ~14 universities in Africa according to Times Higher Education (THE) 2025.

Entrepreneurship has emerged as a focal point in Tunisia's development strategy, with strong government and institutional support. The landmark Startup Act (2018) created a unique legal framework with generous incentives that has catalysed innovation across the economy. To nurture this ecosystem, a network of incubators, accelerators, and funding programmes has been established, including the government-backed Startup Tunisia programme that offers venture capital funding and partnership networks.²⁰ Many universities have integrated entrepreneurship into their educational mission through incubator hubs and initiatives providing coaching specifically for university students with startup ideas.²¹ These efforts embed entrepreneurial

¹⁵ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2025/02/28/world-bank-approves-us-100-million-project-to-strengthen-higher-education-and-boost-employability-in-tunisia>

¹⁶ https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/he_tunisia_2019.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.ef.com/wen/epi/regions/africa/tunisia/>

¹⁸ School enrolment, tertiary (% gross) – Tunisia, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). Stat Bulk Data Download Service. Accessed 5 April 2025. apiportal.uis.unesco.org/bdds

¹⁹ https://www.icmedproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/WP4_POLICY-BRIEF_TUNISIA.pdf

²⁰ <https://resilient.digital-africa.co/en/blog/2024/03/05/tu-nisia-startup-act-four-years-to-develop-the-entrepreneurial-ecosystem-assessment/>

²¹ See a list here: <https://startup.gov.tn/en/partners-programs>

<https://opportunities-insight.britishcouncil.org/>

culture on campuses through business plan competitions, mentorship programmes, and industry collaboration.

Tunisia demonstrates increasing openness to transnational education (TNE) initiatives as part of its internationalisation strategy. The government views TNE as a means to build capacity and improve domestic higher education quality, and considers internationalisation a strategic priority to enhance academic standards, foster global partnerships, and attract international students.²² Policies have been developed to recognise foreign qualifications and facilitate international collaboration. In practice, Tunisia has welcomed foreign institutions such as France's Université Paris-Dauphine, which established a Tunis campus in 2009. Many Tunisian universities have developed dual-degree or exchange programmes with European partners and participate actively in EU initiatives like Erasmus+. Tunisian institutions, including the Mediterranean School of Business and ESPRIT, offer programmes in English to appeal to a diverse student body, and the country engages in research collaborations such as the International Consortium for Personalised Medicine (ICPerMed). Tunisia is an associated country in Horizon Europe, and is 'the best performing Maghreb country in the programme'.²³ However, according to the UK's Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), only 70 students from Tunisia studied in UK TNE programmes in 2022-23, mostly through online, flexible learning, and the majority through taught master's programmes, with only 25 studying for undergraduate degrees.²⁴

Tunisia is also developing digital education as part of its TNE expansion, increasing online and blended learning to enable cross-border programmes. The country has set an ambitious target of having 10% of its student population coming from overseas by 2025, up from approximately 4% pre-pandemic.²⁵ The majority of international students currently come from the Middle East and Africa.²⁶ This internationalisation approach, combined with ongoing reforms, offers a conducive environment for UK universities to establish various partnership models with Tunisian institutions.

2. Tunisia-UK higher education collaboration in enterprise and entrepreneurship

In recent years, collaborations between UK and Tunisian universities have flourished, particularly in the areas of enterprise, entrepreneurship, and employability. These efforts are driven by shared objectives to enhance innovation, improve graduate outcomes, and contribute to regional economic development. With the support of institutions such as the British Council, NCEE, and various government bodies, these partnerships are transforming higher education through systemic reform and international cooperation.

The collaboration between UK and Tunisian universities in the field of enterprise and entrepreneurship has matured into a multifaceted partnership, encompassing policy dialogue, institutional reform, academic mobility, and community-based innovation. These initiatives have

²² https://www.icmedproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/WP4_POLICY-BRIEF_TUNISIA.pdf

²³ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/tunisia_en#cooperation

²⁴ HESA Open data and official statistics <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis>

²⁵ <https://www.msmunify.com/blogs/tunisia-eyes-to-become-intl-study-destination/>

²⁶ UNESCO mobility indicators <https://databrowser.uis.unesco.org/>

not only strengthened educational systems but have also contributed to wider social and economic resilience in both countries.

As Tunisia continues to prioritise entrepreneurship and innovation in its higher education reform agenda, the UK remains a committed partner in fostering entrepreneurial ecosystems, enhancing employability, and building sustainable, globally connected institutions.

The Tunisia-United Kingdom Joint Commission for Higher Education and Scientific Research, led by Ministers in both the UK and Tunisian governments, serves as a strategic platform for collaboration between universities, and higher education stakeholders. Its primary purpose is to enhance partnerships, align educational priorities, and drive innovation in higher education and research, with its objectives being:

1. Strengthening Bilateral Cooperation – Facilitating long-term academic and research partnerships between UK and Tunisian institutions.
2. Enhancing Graduate Employability – Supporting initiatives that improve skills development, entrepreneurship education, and workforce readiness.
3. Promoting Research and Innovation – Encouraging joint research projects, knowledge exchange, and technology transfer to bridge the gap between academia and industry.
4. Supporting Institutional Development – Sharing best practices in university governance, leadership, accreditation, and internationalisation.
5. Encouraging Mobility and Exchange – Expanding opportunities for student and faculty exchanges, scholarships, and collaborative training programmes.

Key initiatives and achievements that define the evolving UK–Tunisian collaboration in enterprise and entrepreneurship under the auspices of the Tunisia-United Kingdom Joint Commission for Higher Education and Scientific Research are presented below.

2.1 Strategic recognition of entrepreneurship

A landmark moment in this collaborative journey came in July 2024 when the University of Manouba became the first African institution to receive the Entrepreneurial University Award from NCEE. This prestigious three-year accreditation recognises a university’s comprehensive and inclusive strategy to embed entrepreneurship across its operations – from teaching and curriculum development to staff training, infrastructure, and community outreach. By embedding a structured accreditation framework, NCEE aims to create a sustainable mechanism for improving university management and entrepreneurial impact across Tunisia.²⁷

The award ceremony, attended by UK Ambassador Helen Winterton and senior Tunisian officials, underscored the depth of bilateral cooperation in the higher education sector. The recognition was made possible through support from the British Council and the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, reflecting the alignment of institutional goals with national development strategies.

²⁷ Launched in 2024, the NCEE Entrepreneurial Award was presented to Anglia Ruskin University (UK) and Manouba University (Tunisia) in recognition of their contributions to entrepreneurial education. <https://ncee.org.uk/award/>
<https://opportunities-insight.britishcouncil.org/>

2.2 Institutional and policy-level collaboration

At the policy level, the Tunisia-United Kingdom Joint Commission for Higher Education and Scientific Research has been instrumental in driving forward a shared agenda for innovation and academic development.

A significant step forward in quality assurance and institutional alignment came in July 2024, when the UK's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Tunisia's Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation in Higher Education and Scientific Research (ATEA). The agreement formalised cooperation in areas such as mutual recognition of standards, capacity building, and the development of joint academic programmes. This initiative not only strengthens academic ties but also enhances the quality and competitiveness of higher education in both countries.

2.3 Capacity building and knowledge exchange

The British Council has played a pivotal role in building institutional capacity and enabling knowledge exchange between UK and Tunisian universities. Through a range of programmes, the British Council has supported the strengthening of cooperation between existing Career and Skills Certification Centres (Centres de Carrières et de Certification des Compétences – 4C) across Tunisian institutions, helping to bridge the gap between education and the labour market. It has also facilitated enterprise curriculum development and provided platforms for partnership-building through European frameworks such as Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020.

Complementing these efforts, the NCEE has extended its enterprise development work to Tunisia as part of its wider engagement across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Its activities focus on training university leaders, promoting entrepreneurial mindsets among faculty, and embedding innovation at the heart of university strategy. Over 100 leaders and practitioners from Tunisian universities attended a bespoke training programme in February 2024 to embed enterprise and entrepreneurship in the curriculum, funded by the British Council Tunisia. Academics from all public universities were invited to attend. These workshops focused on embedding entrepreneurial skills within curricula, particularly in priority sectors such as renewable energy, agriculture, health, and environmental sustainability. Recognising that entrepreneurship education is not limited to business creation, these workshops supported curriculum development to equip students with critical problem-solving, adaptability, and innovation skills that enhance employability across all industries.

Eight Tunisian higher education institutions are now part of the 100 members of NCEE's Global Alliance of Entrepreneurial Universities.²⁸ This provides a platform for networking, knowledge exchange, and access to international best practices, helping Tunisian universities enhance their global visibility and leadership in entrepreneurship education.

In Tunisia, this work supports national reform goals while aligning with global trends in higher education internationalisation. It contributes to key national priorities, including enhancing quality,

²⁸ To date these are University of Manouba, University of Sousse, University of Sfax, University of Tunis, University of Jendouba, University of Carthage, University of Tunis El Manar, and University of Gafsa, a full list of universities in MENA can be found here <https://ncee.org.uk/global-engagement/middle-east/>
<https://opportunities-insight.britishcouncil.org/>

embedding a culture of entrepreneurship, and promoting high-employability fields, all core pillars of Tunisia's higher education reform strategy.

2.4 Academic collaboration and research exchange

Beyond policy and institutional reforms, academic collaboration has also deepened through joint research and mobility initiatives. In early 2024, St John's College, University of Oxford, hosted a workshop in partnership with the Tunisian Academy of Letters, Sciences and Arts. The event brought together early career researchers from both countries to explore the theme of "Crises and Changes", fostering cross-cultural dialogue and academic exchange.

The workshop served as a platform for participants to share research, develop joint publications, and explore the social dimensions of resilience and innovation. It also laid the groundwork for future collaborative projects and highlighted the importance of academic mobility in enriching research cultures and international understanding.

2.5 Enterprise for regional development

One of the earliest and most impactful examples of UK-Tunisia cooperation in enterprise development was the "Tounes Tekhdem" (Tunisia is Working) initiative, launched in 2013 in collaboration with France.²⁹ Aimed at tackling youth unemployment and supporting economic regeneration in underserved regions, the programme reached over 3,500 young people aged 18 to 35.³⁰

Through targeted training, mentorship, and enterprise development support, the initiative helped create around 125 new businesses. It served as a practical model of how international cooperation can contribute to inclusive growth and entrepreneurship-led development at the grassroots level.

3. Transnational Education Sustainability Framework

In December 2024, the British Council published a report on sustainable transnational education (TNE) partnerships between UK universities and institutions in Egypt, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, and an accompanying TNE sustainability framework.³¹ It provides a useful lens through which to explore potential UK-Tunisia partnerships.

The research revealed that sustainable TNE extends beyond financial considerations to encompass alignment with host countries' development goals and institutional objectives. TNE

²⁹ The "Tounes Tekhdem" initiative was funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), now part of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), and the French Development Agency (Agence Française de Développement, AFD).

³⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/british-french-joint-cooperation-to-support-employment-in-tunisia>

³¹ <https://opportunities-insight.britishcouncil.org/user/login?destination=/features/examining-sustainability-of-transnational-education-egypt-qatar-and-united-arab-emirates>

sustainability evolves as partnerships mature, requiring adaptation in governance structures, operational practices, and stakeholder engagement strategies.

Different TNE models present distinct sustainability challenges and opportunities. Collaborative models (joint/dual degrees) emphasise shared decision-making and academic integration, while independent models (such as international branch campuses and franchises) focus on maintaining academic standards while adapting to local contexts. In both cases, effective leadership and clear communication emerge as critical success factors.

The research identifies that TNE partnerships typically evolve from primarily educational delivery to encompass deeper research collaboration and industry partnerships as they mature. This progression reflects the capacity development within host institutions and the broadening of partnership objectives over time.

Student experience remains central to sustainability, with employability, international exposure, and educational quality also emerging as key. Faculty development represents another significant sustainability dimension, with knowledge exchange and capacity building benefiting both UK and partner institutions.

The framework identified five interconnected pillars essential for sustainable TNE partnerships and explored what these look like in the developing stage (the first three years), and the maturing stage (beyond this). These are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of the British Council’s Transnational Education (TNE) Sustainability Framework

Pillar	Developing Stage (Years 0-3)	Maturing Stage (After Year 3)
Mutual benefits	Expanding access to quality education; supporting employability; enhancing student experience; improving host institution capabilities	Enhancing career development and mobility; demonstrating graduate success; promoting equitable knowledge exchange
Financial viability	Market assessment; strategic business case development; student recruitment strategies; operational efficiency	Self-sustainability; expansion and diversification; revenue stream diversification; sustainable operational practices
Partnership breadth and depth	Programme development; research capacity building; system integration	Programme enhancement; advanced research collaboration; operational optimisation
Leadership and people development	Stakeholder engagement; governance structures; HR policies	Sustained distributed leadership; ongoing policy review; staff development
Mutual trust and communication	Building initial trust; managing expectations	Enhanced collaboration; advanced expectation management

The framework captures the evolving nature of TNE partnerships, recognising that sustainability requirements shift as relationships mature and deepen. Each pillar includes specific indicators to assess and enhance partnership sustainability, providing practical guidance for institutions developing or expanding TNE operations. The indicators are adaptable to different institutional contexts while maintaining focus on core sustainability principles.

By applying these five pillars – mutual benefits, financial viability, partnership breadth and depth, leadership and people development, and mutual trust and communication – we can ensure that new collaborative initiatives (such as those between the UK and Tunisia outlined in the following section) progress effectively from their developing stages through to maturity. The proposed entrepreneurial partnership initiatives align with this framework, addressing each pillar to create sustainable, mutually beneficial relationships between UK and Tunisian institutions. As we explore specific thematic opportunities in health, agriculture, and business, these framework elements provide both a foundation for initial engagement and a roadmap for long-term sustainability, allowing partnerships to evolve naturally from educational delivery to deeper research collaboration and robust industry connections that benefit both countries' higher education ecosystems.

4. Entrepreneurial partnership initiatives

Drawing on our conversations with UK and Tunisian universities, our work in Tunisia over the last eight years, and a review of policy opportunities, we have identified several areas for partnership. Creating these pathways will increase international collaborations and provide opportunities for researchers and students to engage with global industries. For example, as partnerships mature, we recommend facilitating partnerships with industries in both Europe and Africa, leveraging the UK's global reach to support expansion into international markets. To complement this, export support programmes can also be created to help university spin-offs and student ventures access global markets.

The potential initiatives below provide a comprehensive framework for enhancing UK-Tunisia higher education collaboration in entrepreneurship and innovation. By focusing on these strategic areas, both countries can leverage their strengths to create sustainable partnerships that benefit their economies, educational institutions, and future generations of entrepreneurs. The majority of suggestions operate across disciplines and markets. We have suggested three 'deep dive' initiatives that are at the forefront of innovation with health innovation testbeds, knowledge transfer partnerships in agriculture and innovation consultancies.

4.1 Establish UK-Tunisia enterprise centre partnerships

Enterprise centres in both Tunisia and the UK play a central role in nurturing entrepreneurship and stimulating regional economic development. In Tunisia, these centres are often designed to address structural challenges such as youth unemployment and regional inequality, offering tailored training, mentorship, and startup incubation services. In the UK, enterprise centres – typically situated within universities – support innovation ecosystems by helping students, graduates, and staff turn ideas into viable ventures. The exchange of expertise and practice

between UK and Tunisian centres can provide a dynamic platform for joint innovation, enterprise education, and inclusive economic engagement, particularly when supported by formalised institutional partnerships.

Establishing a UK-Tunisia twinning arrangement between university-based enterprise centres offers significant benefits, including the development of enterprise capabilities that are directly relevant to employability and skills for the future workforce. This partnership would strengthen industry collaboration, linking academic learning to applied experience and employability, fostering connections between academia and both private and public sectors, and leading to student internships, staff exchanges, research collaborations, and entrepreneurial opportunities that enhance graduate and staff employment prospects.

These enterprise partnerships should include clear pathways to employment through entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial activity. For example, graduates participating in joint incubation programmes could gain direct access to startup roles or enterprise fellowships, while academic and professional staff engaging in collaborative research and innovation projects could benefit from enhanced career development and knowledge exchange opportunities.

These enterprise partnerships should include support for women in entrepreneurship. Building on successful UK and Tunisian entrepreneurship networks and initiatives, these centres should incorporate gender-inclusive approaches including women-focused mentorship programmes, networking events that connect female students and graduates with successful women entrepreneurs, and specialised training addressing gender-specific challenges in business development. Both countries can benefit from sharing best practices in entrepreneurship education and venture creation, embedding these practices in university curricula and employability frameworks. Collaborative research on effective intervention strategies could inform policy development in both regions, while joint funding initiatives could specifically support women-led startups and graduate enterprises emerging from these enterprise partnerships.

Additionally, a focus on sustainability and GreenTech would provide access to innovative solutions aligned with Tunisia's environmental challenges while also opening up new graduate employment sectors in green industries. We recommend:

- Aligning enterprise centre objectives with local economic needs such as agricultural technology, digitalisation, or sustainable urban development.
- Establishing joint projects or incubation spaces for startups to drive innovation and create graduate and researcher employment opportunities.
- Creating gateways to global markets to support expansion into international markets and ensuring that university spin-offs, student ventures, and staff-led enterprises can access these markets as part of their growth and employability journey.
- This initiative would facilitate partnerships with industries in both Europe and Africa, leveraging the UK's global reach. Export support programmes could be created to help university spin-offs and student ventures access global markets, directly contributing to graduate employability and international career pathways.

It is recommended that:

-
- The British Council and the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research fund the initial phase of the twinning programme, including staff exchanges, institutional visits, and collaborative planning workshops, and facilitating technical support with identification and matching of suitable partners.
 - Twinned UK-Tunisian university enterprise centres co-develop joint innovation projects and incubation spaces to support collaborative startup development and entrepreneurial activity, including for female entrepreneurs.
 - The Tunisian Ministry of Industry, Mines and Energy and SMEs, along with the UK's Department for Business and Trade, be engaged to connect university enterprise centres with industrial clusters, chambers of commerce, and innovation ecosystems, creating direct graduate and researcher pathways into employment and enterprise creation.
 - Sustainability and inclusive growth are embedded as cross-cutting themes within all joint activities, with a particular focus on graduate employment, gender equity, youth inclusion, and climate-responsive enterprise.
 - Private sector partners and diaspora networks be encouraged to participate in mentorship, investment, and collaborative innovation programmes across both countries, helping to link higher education activity with employment outcomes and entrepreneurial growth.

4.2 Study visits and visiting scholars

Study visits play a vital role in enhancing the international outlook of both faculty and students by exposing them to new research methodologies, curriculum design practices, and models of university-industry collaboration. In the context of enterprise education, such visits are particularly valuable in emerging areas such as GreenTech, AI, and sustainable development. Cross-cultural exchanges foster deeper mutual understanding, open doors to future research partnerships, and support the co-development of entrepreneurial teaching and support models tailored to regional needs.

Building on this, an enterprise-focused visiting scholar programme would further deepen bilateral cooperation, enabling longer-term academic placements focused on knowledge exchange, collaborative teaching, and institutional development. These visits would allow for:

- In-depth academic collaboration on topics such as entrepreneurship education, social innovation, and digital enterprise.
- Transfer of innovative teaching practices and research approaches between institutions.
- Strengthening institutional ties that support joint funding applications and long-term cooperation.

To maximise the impact of these initiatives, it is recommended that:

- The British Council Tunisia and Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research organise thematic study visits around key national and shared priorities, including sustainable agriculture, AI applications in healthcare, and green technologies.
- The Tunisian Ministry for Higher Education and Scientific Research designs a structured, enterprise-focused visiting scholar programme with the help of technical experts to support

extended academic exchanges and co-teaching opportunities in entrepreneurship and innovation.

- Exchange opportunities are extended to include university professional services staff, to support institutional capacity building in areas such as enterprise support, research management, and governance.
- Host universities develop a structured framework for visiting scholars, ensuring they contribute to host institutions through guest lectures, research workshops, mentorship for staff and students, and strategic planning discussions.
- Host universities ensure that opportunities for joint publications, co-designed curricula, and shared entrepreneurial education resources are embedded within all exchange and scholar programmes to ensure long-term institutional benefits.

4.3 Professional recognition and leadership programmes

As Tunisia looks to embed innovation and enterprise more deeply within its higher education system, one of the most powerful levers for change lies in the professional recognition and development of university staff. Faculty and administrators are central to building a culture of innovation – but their active engagement in entrepreneurship, industry collaboration, and student startup support often remains undervalued in traditional academic career structures.

Recognising and rewarding these contributions can drive cultural transformation. When academic and professional staff are acknowledged for their role in fostering entrepreneurship – whether through mentoring student ventures, leading community innovation projects, co-authoring research with industry, or developing spinouts – they are more likely to champion institutional enterprise goals and engage in collaborative knowledge exchange.

Professional development programmes that focus on entrepreneurial leadership can offer a valuable framework for embedding innovation into the core mission of universities. Cohort-based models, in particular, have proven effective in supporting university leaders and emerging changemakers to foster entrepreneurial thinking, behaviour, and strategy within their institutions. For Tunisia, adopting such approaches could strengthen the capacity of academic leaders to manage innovation ecosystems, enhance university-industry-government collaboration, and better align institutional strategies with national economic priorities.

It is recommended that:

- The Tunisian Ministry for Higher Education and Scientific Research establishes formal recognition mechanisms for staff engaged in enterprise-related activity, including innovation teaching, industry partnerships, mentoring of startups, and community enterprise work. These mechanisms should be embedded into promotion, appraisal, and academic workload models.
- Tunisian universities participate in entrepreneurial leadership training programmes, building the capacity of academic leaders and professional staff to lead entrepreneurial

transformation. Trained staff should be supported to act as institutional champions for enterprise within their home institutions.³²

- The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research works with universities to embed innovation leadership training into national academic development policies, including the creation of structured pathways for aspiring enterprise leaders in academia.
- The British Council establishes awards to recognise successful academic-industry partnerships and entrepreneurial impact, such as through competitive funding, national recognition schemes, or impact-based assessment frameworks.

4.4 Collaborative research opportunities

There is growing international support for cross-border research collaboration that tackles shared global challenges – particularly in fields like healthcare, sustainable agriculture, climate resilience, and digital transformation. Tunisian and UK universities are well-placed to lead such initiatives, especially when underpinned by strategic funding streams that facilitate academic exchange, institutional partnerships, and knowledge production.

Several funding mechanisms already exist to support this ambition. Programmes such as Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) provide valuable resources for institutional collaboration, including joint research and mobility opportunities. National funding from Tunisia's Programme National de la Recherche (PNR) further enables research capacity development, particularly when co-funded through international cooperation frameworks. Additional opportunities exist through multilateral funders such as Horizon Europe and the African Development Bank, which prioritise interdisciplinary, socially relevant research.

In this context, collaborative research between UK and Tunisian universities can play a transformative role – not only in addressing regional priorities but in enhancing the global research standing and innovation capacity of Tunisian institutions. A structured programme of joint research initiatives and doctoral partnerships would allow institutions to co-create knowledge that is locally grounded yet globally impactful.

PhD collaborations, in particular, offer a strategic route to deepen long-term academic links, build research capacity, and generate solutions to complex industry and societal challenges. These partnerships can foster the next generation of researchers, connect research agendas with enterprise and policy, and promote inclusive, interdisciplinary approaches.

It is recommended that:

- The Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, with UK partner universities, identifies collaborative research initiatives that prioritise high-impact areas of mutual interest, including sustainable agriculture, equitable healthcare access, and AI applications in public services.
- The Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, with UK partner universities, identifies supervised PhD programmes to be established, enabling joint

³² NCEE runs the Entrepreneurial University Leaders programme, which supports higher education leaders to drive innovation and transformation within their universities. For more information visit www.ncee.org.uk/entrepreneurial-leadership
<https://opportunities-insight.britishcouncil.org/>

supervision, dual degrees where feasible, and doctoral research linked to real-world industry and community needs.

4.5 Supporting the growth of technology transfer

A UK-Tunisia partnership on technology transfer presents a significant opportunity to bridge the gap between Tunisia's strong research output and its relatively low commercialisation rates. With a high number of publications per capita, Tunisia has a robust academic foundation, yet the challenge remains in translating this research into tangible economic and societal impact. By collaborating, UK and Tunisian institutions can share best practices on contracting, intellectual property management, and commercialisation agreements, ensuring that staff and students are equipped with the skills and frameworks needed to externalise their innovations effectively. Establishing structured approaches to legal and financial considerations will help universities generate consistent income from technology transfer while fostering a more entrepreneurial research culture.

A collaboration between UK and Tunisian universities can increase the impact of their research, enhance institutional sustainability, and create long-term benefits for both academia and the wider economy. Through structured collaboration, we can drive meaningful progress in innovation-led economic development between the UK and Tunisia.

The NCEE's Global Alliance of Entrepreneurial Universities facilitates community-run, self-managed networks of practitioners and experts allowing for the sharing of practice between universities and is one possible platform that could host a Global Interest Group on technology transfer, alongside other relevant regional or international forums.

It is recommended that:

- Tunisian universities create a special interest group to bring together experts from both countries to exchange knowledge, develop practical guidelines, and support policy alignment.
- The British Council with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research facilitates training programmes that demonstrate successful models of research commercialisation, industry partnerships, and spin-out company formation.

4.6 Student exchange programmes

International mobility is a powerful tool for developing globally-minded graduates and preparing students to contribute to innovation-driven economies. Through short-term exchanges, summer schools, and bootcamps, students gain access to diverse perspectives, expand their professional networks, and acquire critical skills in leadership, cross-cultural communication, and applied problem-solving.

Tunisian universities already have strong foundations in student mobility through their long-standing partnerships with French institutions. These collaborations have included Erasmus+ exchanges, co-organised summer schools, bootcamps, and joint academic modules, especially in engineering, agricultural sciences, and digital innovation. Tunisian students benefit not only from academic learning abroad, but from exposure to different pedagogical methods and real-world applications through project-based learning and internships. These experiences have also

helped forge sustained institutional relationships, often leading to joint degrees or research partnerships.

Building on this experience, a similar model of collaboration with UK universities would bring new dimensions to Tunisia's international engagement. UK institutions offer complementary strengths in areas like enterprise education, interdisciplinary teaching, and links to global innovation ecosystems. The UK also brings significant expertise in entrepreneurship pedagogy and student-led enterprise – providing valuable learning opportunities for Tunisian students who wish to build entrepreneurial mindsets and global competencies.

By designing thematic exchange programmes that align with shared national and sectoral priorities, Tunisia and the UK can co-create impactful student mobility schemes that not only enrich participants academically and professionally, but also strengthen institutional ties and innovation ecosystems.

It is recommended that:

- The British Council considers the development of an exchange programme around areas of shared interest and strategic relevance, such as sustainable agriculture, AI in healthcare, clean energy, and digital business transformation.
- The British Council with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research establishes partnerships with universities to design and deliver reciprocal summer schools and innovation bootcamps, with a focus on entrepreneurship, GreenTech, and social innovation. Programmes should include blended learning formats, mentorship opportunities, and intercultural learning components.
- Universities create structured exchange programmes to integrate academic learning with hands-on industry exposure, such as through internships, consultancy projects with local enterprises, or enterprise challenges co-hosted by private sector partners.
- Each mobility programme includes clear follow-up pathways for continued collaboration, such as alumni networks, joint project grants, or opportunities for return visits and further study. This would build sustained relationships between participants and institutions.
- Tunisian universities leverage their experience with French institutions to co-develop trilateral or multilateral exchanges that include both UK and French partners, promoting collaborative learning across diverse innovation systems.

4.7 Real-time student collaboration

Real-time digital collaboration brings students together across borders to co-create solutions, learn from one another, and tackle shared challenges. By designing collaborative, challenge-based learning environments, universities can offer accessible, scalable, and impactful opportunities that develop 21st century skills and promote entrepreneurial mindsets.

Digital-first collaborations can significantly broaden participation, allowing students who may not be able to travel to still engage in international innovation experiences. These initiatives not only equip students with teamwork and problem-solving capabilities but also help them build global networks, understand different cultural and business contexts, and foster inclusive entrepreneurship.

UK universities have demonstrated strong leadership in this space. For example, University College London (UCL) runs the UCL Challenge Innovation Forum, where students collaborate with global peers and industry partners to solve urban development problems. Similarly, King's College London's Entrepreneurship Institute delivers "King's Global Challenge" programmes that connect students across continents in virtual innovation labs.

Adapting such models for UK-Tunisia collaboration would provide students in both countries with real-world, high-impact experiences. Tunisian businesses, public sector organisations, and social enterprises could present sector-specific challenges, while universities provide structured environments and mentorship to support student innovation. This approach is well-suited to tackling cross-cutting priorities such as digital transformation, sustainable agriculture, or healthcare innovation.

These collaborations can be linked to existing mobility or enterprise programmes and further strengthened through industry sponsorship, digital innovation platforms, and joint university facilitation.

It is recommended that:

- The British Council seeks to support digital collaboration programmes to connect UK and Tunisian students through real-time innovation challenges, using accessible online platforms to facilitate cross-border engagement and co-creation.
- Universities establish Challenge Lab-style programmes, where multidisciplinary student teams work on real-world problems posed by Tunisian businesses or public sector organisations. Staff from both countries would support teams with expert guidance, and outcomes could feed into local implementation strategies.
- Universities host thematic hackathons alternating annually between Tunisia and the UK (physically or virtually), focusing on sector-specific themes such as agri-digitalisation, fintech, climate resilience, or inclusive health innovation. These events should include mentorship and pathways for venture development.
- Universities seek to embed co-supervised online collaborative projects into curricula, especially in enterprise or capstone modules. These could be supported by mentors and involve joint presentations, business planning, or product prototyping.
- The UK's Department for Business and Trade and the Ministry for Higher Education and Scientific Research establish an annual student innovation competition, inviting joint entries from UK and Tunisian teams, with sponsorship and prizes from industry partners. Winning projects could receive seed funding, implementation support, or opportunities to pitch to investors.

4.8 University recognition and profile

In Tunisia, the drive to foster a knowledge-based, innovation-driven economy has placed universities at the heart of national development. As institutions expand their role beyond traditional teaching and research to include enterprise, community engagement, and startup support, there is a growing need for mechanisms that recognise and reward this transformation. Despite significant progress, much of the entrepreneurial activity within Tunisian universities

remains under-recognised, both nationally and internationally. Establishing formal recognition – through credible, globally respected awards – can help raise the visibility of pioneering work, incentivise innovation across the higher education sector, and build momentum for embedding entrepreneurship as a core institutional mission. Awards also provide a structured way to benchmark progress, align with international standards, and attract new partnerships and investment.

One such platform for recognition is the Entrepreneurial University Award, offered by NCEE. The Award provides an international benchmark for excellence in entrepreneurial education, institutional leadership, and innovation ecosystem development. It highlights universities that embed entrepreneurship across teaching, research, governance, and community engagement. Tunisian institutions engaging in enterprise activities – particularly those supporting student-led innovation, community-based entrepreneurship, and interdisciplinary startup ecosystems – stand to gain significantly from participating in this recognition process.

By applying for or being shortlisted for the Award, Tunisian universities can demonstrate their commitment to innovation on a global stage. Recognition can enhance their attractiveness to international students, academic staff, and industry partners. It can also act as a catalyst for securing new funding, developing bilateral partnerships, and influencing national policy by showcasing best practice. More information regarding the Award is found in Annex 1.

Beyond visibility, the Award provides a structured framework through which institutions can self-assess and align their strategies with international standards. It encourages the institutionalisation of entrepreneurial culture – not just within business schools, but across all disciplines, faculties, and levels of leadership.

It is recommended that:

- Universities in Tunisia align their entrepreneurship strategies with international frameworks and standards, including those promoted by NCEE, OECD, and UNESCO, while ensuring relevance to national development priorities such as regional employment, youth inclusion, and green innovation.
- Universities use awards frameworks as a strategic development tool – encouraging institutional reflection, benchmarking progress, and driving investment in innovation and enterprise infrastructure.

4.9 Health innovation testbeds

As Tunisia continues to modernise its healthcare infrastructure and enhance health outcomes through digitalisation and innovation, the concept of health research and innovation testbeds presents a timely and strategic opportunity. Testbeds are environments – often anchored in universities – where new technologies, services, and models of care can be developed, trialled, and evaluated in real-world settings, often in close collaboration with industry, government, and communities. These platforms serve as critical spaces for experimentation, co-creation, and evidence generation, allowing academic research to translate directly into economic and societal impact.

In the UK, the model is well-established. Institutions such as Imperial College London, the University of Manchester, and the University of Oxford host health innovation testbeds in <https://opportunities-insight.britishcouncil.org/>

partnership with the National Health Service (NHS) and industry partners. These testbeds focus on topics ranging from AI-driven diagnostics to remote monitoring for chronic diseases, and offer a blueprint for how universities can become engines for regional innovation. For example, the Manchester Health Innovation Campus offers access to labs, data, clinical expertise, and commercial partnerships – enabling rapid prototyping and scale-up of digital health solutions.

In Tunisia, while the testbed concept is less formally institutionalised, there is a strong appetite for innovation in the health sector, especially post-Covid-19. The government's National Strategy for Digital Health (2020-25) and growing support for health tech startups signal readiness for structured innovation platforms. Tunisia has also made progress in digitising health records, piloting telemedicine, and investing in health-related data infrastructure. However, there remains a need for formal mechanisms to trial and validate innovations, and to connect academia, healthcare providers, and emerging entrepreneurs in a sustained ecosystem.

The creation of a bilateral Tunisia–UK health research and innovation testbed would bridge these needs and opportunities. It would allow universities from both countries to collaborate on real-time solutions in areas such as digital health, public health resilience, and chronic disease management, with clear pathways for commercialisation, policy engagement, and academic publication. Importantly, it would position universities not just as knowledge producers, but as active participants in innovation ecosystems – a direction aligned with Tunisia's higher education reform agenda and the UK's global ambitions for science and innovation diplomacy.

Focus areas for a health innovation testbed could include:

1. Digital Health and Telemedicine: Platforms for remote patient monitoring, AI-assisted diagnostics, and teleconsultation – especially for rural and underserved communities.
2. Public Health Systems: Collaborative research on epidemic preparedness, health equity, and the use of health analytics for strategic planning.
3. Chronic Disease Management: Cross-institutional work on diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and mental health – areas of growing concern in both countries.
4. Community Health Innovation: Development of culturally-sensitive digital tools and behavioural interventions to promote health literacy and community empowerment.
5. Health Policy and Governance: Comparative analysis of health financing, regulation, and public-private partnerships to inform reform processes.

This bilateral programme could represent not only a step forward in innovation, but also a strategic move to future-proof health systems, support entrepreneurial ecosystems, and deliver mutual academic and economic benefit. More information is set out in Annex 2.

It is recommended that:

- The UK and Tunisian governments initiate discussions with universities and health systems to develop a health innovation testbed.

4.10 Knowledge transfer partnerships in agri-tech

As Tunisia seeks to strengthen its knowledge economy and support industrial transformation, structured collaboration between universities and businesses has become increasingly important.

One proven model that can be adapted to this context is the Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP), a UK initiative led by Innovate UK, which enables businesses to access academic expertise and research capacity to solve real-world challenges.³³

In the UK, KTPs have been a critical mechanism for improving productivity, innovation, and competitiveness, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Adapting a variation of the KTP model for a Tunisia-UK collaboration would enable shared innovation and learning, while supporting enterprise growth and applied research.

Each project would bring together an academic institution from each country with a business in Tunisia (or regionally), focusing on co-created solutions that drive economic and social value. These KTP-style partnerships could be particularly valuable in sectors where Tunisia has emerging strengths and where UK institutions have strong innovation experience – such as digital health, agri-tech, renewable energy, manufacturing, and education technology. Each KTP-style project could run over a 12-month cycle, allowing sufficient time for knowledge exchange, problem diagnosis, solution design, implementation, and impact evaluation. The projects would be supported by a dedicated associate (a recent graduate or postdoctoral researcher), supervised jointly by academic mentors and business leads. The partnership would result in tangible outputs such as new products, improved processes, commercialisation pathways, or the adoption of new business models.

This model also aligns with Tunisia's focus on innovation-driven entrepreneurship and its ambition to link universities more closely with the labour market and national development goals. At the same time, it creates an opportunity for UK universities to extend their global engagement through applied, impact-focused partnerships that also benefit teaching, research, and employability strategies. A model is included in Annex 2.

It is recommended that:

- A pilot programme of three to five KTP-style projects is established, co-funded by the British Council, UK universities, and Tunisian ministries (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Ministry of Industry). These pilots should focus on priority sectors and generate evidence for wider scale-up.
- Tunisian and UK universities jointly identify business partners through industry engagement forums, chambers of commerce, and sector-specific innovation hubs. The partnerships should favour SMEs with strong local impact potential.
- A structured governance and mentoring framework is developed for these partnerships, involving bi-national advisory boards, innovation mentors, and project management toolkits tailored to the Tunisian context.
- Project outcomes are disseminated through an annual Tunisia-UK Innovation Forum, celebrating successes, capturing lessons learned, and showcasing scalable models for research–industry collaboration.

³³ <https://iuk-ktp.org.uk/>

4.11 Innovation consultancies/business clinics

In Tunisia, where a growing number of SMEs and startups are seeking access to regional and international markets, there is a clear opportunity to build university-led innovation consultancies that provide research, business model development, and market insight. This is particularly relevant in high-potential sectors such as agri-tech, digital services, tourism, health innovation, and renewable energy, where businesses often lack access to affordable consultancy and strategic support.

The programme would facilitate cross-border collaboration between students and academic staff from both Tunisia and the UK, forming interdisciplinary consultancy teams tasked with addressing business challenges submitted by enterprises in either country. These might include developing market entry strategies, evaluating digital transformation plans, assessing sustainability performance, or co-creating scalable business models.

Furthermore, this model also encourages entrepreneurial mindsets and builds practical employability skills among students – including project management, intercultural communication, market research, and client engagement. At the same time, it strengthens the university-business interface, embedding institutions as active participants in national innovation ecosystems.

The proposed Tunisia-UK Business Clinic Programme is a strategic initiative designed to link students, academics, and businesses from both countries in collaborative, real-world problem solving. Drawing inspiration from established models such as the Liverpool John Moores University Business Clinic, the programme aims to connect student teams with enterprises to deliver consultancy-style projects focused on growth, innovation, and market development. These initiatives would enable students to apply their academic knowledge to real business challenges while providing tangible benefits to participating companies. More information is provided in Annex 2.

It is recommended that:

- The British Council funds a pilot Tunisia-UK Business Clinic Network, linking key entrepreneurial universities.
- Student consultancy teams work on challenges identified by chambers of commerce, local business networks, and enterprise support organisations, with clearly defined scopes and deliverables.
- The programme includes virtual mobility options to enable sustained participation and collaboration, even where physical exchanges are not feasible. These could include digital platforms for project work, mentorship, and final presentations.
- The Ministry for Higher Education and Scientific Research and the UK's Department for Business and Trade host an annual showcase and awards event to highlight the most impactful projects, bringing together universities, businesses, investors, and policymakers. This would increase visibility, attract sponsors, and inspire future partnerships.

Annex 1: NCEE Entrepreneurial University Award – Overview, Process and Impact

Purpose and Overview

The NCEE Entrepreneurial University Award is a national and international accreditation recognising higher education institutions that demonstrate excellence in entrepreneurial leadership, culture, and impact. Developed from two decades of collaboration with universities, governments, and sector bodies, the Award validates and promotes an institution's entrepreneurial activity and societal contribution. It serves as both a badge of recognition and a roadmap for development, supporting universities to articulate their transformative potential in economic and social innovation.

Award Process

The process is designed to be rigorous yet flexible, allowing institutions to reflect on and evidence their entrepreneurial achievements:

1. **Eligibility Check** – Institutions complete an expression of interest followed by an initial consultation to assess readiness.
2. **Site Visit** – NCEE conducts a structured visit, offering developmental feedback and guidance.
3. **Application Submission** – The university provides a detailed application and supporting evidence demonstrating leadership, culture, policy, and impact.
4. **Expert Review** – Independent panels of sector experts review the submission.
5. **Award Granted** – Successful applicants receive accreditation for three years (exceptional institutions for five years). Unsuccessful applicants receive feedback and one free resubmission opportunity.

There are four application windows annually (January, March, May, and October). The process typically takes up to 12 weeks from submission to final decision.

Impacts and Benefits

Awarded universities gain multiple benefits that extend across institutional reputation, staff development, and external engagement:

- **Recognition and Validation** – Public acknowledgment as an “Entrepreneurial University”, enhancing visibility in marketing, prospectuses, and public communications.
- **Comprehensive Institutional Report** – Tailored feedback identifying strengths, opportunities, and recommendations for growth.
- **Global Network Membership** – Automatic Premium membership of the *Global Alliance of Entrepreneurial Universities*, providing global visibility and collaboration opportunities.

-
- **Access to Opportunities** – Priority inclusion in externally funded programmes and projects through NCEE.
 - **Professional Development** – Discounted access to *Entrepreneurial Leadership* programmes and masterclasses for staff.
 - **Enhanced Employability Impact** – Demonstrates an institution's commitment to innovation, enterprise, and employability – supporting students, graduates, and staff in developing entrepreneurial mindsets and career pathways.

Role of Universities Post-Recognition

Once accredited, universities are expected to:

- Act as regional and national exemplars of entrepreneurial practice, sharing insights with peers.
- Embed entrepreneurial leadership and innovation across teaching, research, and civic engagement.
- Contribute to NCEE's global community through case studies, collaborative projects, and benchmarking.
- Use the Award as a strategic development tool to guide institutional improvement, strengthen employer partnerships, and enhance graduate outcomes.

For more information visit www.ncee.org.uk/award

Annex 2: Proposed activities by sector

This annex provides further detail on the recommended initiatives set out in the report, organised by thematic area to support clearer understanding and implementation.

Health

A framework could be created for a bilateral health research and innovation testbed, connecting leading universities in Tunisia and the UK to foster collaborative research, innovation, and capacity building. The testbeds directly support economic development, helping businesses to start up, thrive and grow, creating a digital health ecosystem, and facilitating new ideas and innovations in partnership with industry and universities.

This evolves the concept of 'outside-in' and 'spin-ins' to position universities as testbeds for innovation and development in Tunisia (and beyond). It would seek to convert ideas to innovations. This is about innovation testbeds and linking universities and industry more closely to support and facilitate new ideas or innovations. The testbed is about making university expertise, facilities and networks available to entrepreneurs and organisations to take forward innovations and drive economic development through venture creation and growth as well as wealth and job creation. Businesses created or supported, and innovations (intellectual property/commercialisation) are key outcomes.

Innovation testbeds act as platforms for universities and industry to collaborate, fostering real-world testing and accelerating the translation of research into tangible applications, ultimately driving economic growth and societal advancement.

- Real-world testing environments – Testbeds provide a controlled but near-real-world environment for testing new technologies, products, and processes.
- Collaboration hubs – They facilitate collaboration between universities, industry partners, and other stakeholders, enabling knowledge sharing and joint innovation.
- Accelerating innovation – Testbeds help bridge the gap between research and application, speeding up the development and deployment of innovative solutions.

Global health challenges, from the rising burden of non-communicable diseases to the urgent need for digital health innovation, require international collaboration to develop scalable and culturally adaptable solutions. Tunisia and the UK share mutual interests in advancing health research, improving health system resilience, and leveraging technology to address public health needs.

The proposed testbed aims to:

- Establish a structured platform for joint research and innovation projects.
- Facilitate cross-border health data research under appropriate ethical and legal frameworks.
- Support the co-design and testing of innovative health technologies addressing shared health challenges.

- Enable knowledge exchange and capacity building through researcher mobility, joint workshops, and training.
- Promote evidence-based policy recommendations based on comparative health systems research.
- Strengthen institutional partnerships between Tunisian and UK universities in the health sector.

Focus areas

Industry and entrepreneurs are an important element of this ecosystem. It is not just about generating research but utilising expertise, facilities and networks within and between universities to generate more commercial opportunities, wealth and job creation. Businesses supported will be a key performance indicator.

The testbed will focus on, but is not limited to, the following thematic areas:

Thematic area	Key research topics
Digital Health and Telemedicine	Remote patient monitoring, teleconsultation platforms, AI for diagnosis
Public Health Systems	Health data analytics, epidemic preparedness, health equity
Chronic Disease Management	Diabetes, cardiovascular disease, mental health
Community Health Innovations	Health literacy, culturally sensitive digital tools, behaviour change strategies
Health Policy and Governance	Comparative policy analysis, health financing, public-private partnerships

Proposed activities

- Selection of two to three initial testbed projects with co-leads from Tunisia and the UK.
- Projects may focus on:
 - Cross-border health data sharing platforms.
 - Comparative studies on rural health delivery.
 - Testing of co-developed health tech tools in both contexts.
- Creation of a Tunisia-UK Health Research Mobility Scheme to support:
 - Short-term research placements.
 - Joint supervision of MSc/PhD students.
 - Virtual exchange programmes.
- Annual Tunisia-UK Health Innovation Forum to share results and attract new partners.

-
- Thematic workshops and hackathons focused on health data science, AI in health, and community health innovations.
 - Development of open-access knowledge products (policy briefs, case studies, toolkits).
 - Development of a bilateral ethical charter for health data sharing and collaborative research.
 - Joint consultation with health ministries and regulatory bodies to align on data governance and patient consent standards.

Agriculture, Agritech and Agribusiness

Agri-Automate: UK-Tunisia Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) Model

Using a variation on the Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) model, this innovative initiative aims to foster collaboration between industry and universities in Tunisia. The key objective of this project is to leverage the expertise and resources of academics from both countries to drive innovation, enhance research capabilities, and contribute to the socio-economic development of both nations.

The KTP model between Tunisia and the UK represents a powerful tool for fostering international academic collaboration. By bringing together leading academics from both countries, this initiative aims to enhance research and innovation, drive socio-economic development, and create lasting partnerships that will benefit both nations for years to come.

Each KTP project within this model has a duration of 12 months. This timeframe allows for the development of robust research methodologies, implementation of collaborative projects, and the evaluation of outcomes to ensure sustainable benefits.

Key objectives

- Facilitate knowledge exchange between Tunisian and UK academic institutions.
- Enhance research and development capabilities in both countries through joint projects.
- Promote innovation and technological advancements by leveraging combined expertise.
- Support the professional development of academics and researchers involved in the partnership.
- Contribute to the socio-economic growth of Tunisia and the UK by addressing local and global challenges.

Each KTP project will be structured to include:

- A lead academic from Tunisia and a lead academic from the UK.
- A recent graduate from Tunisia.
- A project plan outlining specific commercial objectives, methodologies, and expected outcomes.
- Regular progress meetings and workshops to facilitate ongoing collaboration and knowledge sharing.
- An evaluation phase to assess the impact and success of the project.

Expected outcomes

- Enhanced knowledge exchange and enterprise capabilities and academic networks in both Tunisia and the UK.
- Innovative solutions and technological advancements addressing key challenges.
- Publication of joint research papers and presentation of findings at international conferences.

-
- Strengthened professional skills and development of participating academics and researchers.
 - Long-term partnerships and future collaborative opportunities between Tunisian and UK institutions.

UK/Tunisia Challenge Labs

This Challenge Lab programme with staff and students from Tunisia and UK universities will solve challenges supplied by Tunisian businesses with a focus on agri-tech, veterinary science, agri-business and food innovation.

Many higher education institutions have enterprise activities, which bring entrepreneurship into the curriculum or provide extra-curricular support for it. These usually involve independent programmes of entrepreneurship, project work, industry placements and consultancy. Programmes usually focus on either staff or student groups, the overlap between them only coming at postgraduate level where commercial work is done by a research group.

Project structure

Businesses will bring business or technical challenges and opportunities to the Challenge Lab where:

- A multi-disciplinary team of students and staff from a UK and a Tunisian university will work together to develop solutions.
- For each project, teams will come together with the businesses for a one- or two-day hackathon event, followed by working together online over a number of weeks to complete the project. A final finishing one-day in-person session will precede a presentation of the finished solution to the company.
- Staff are involved to support students through mentoring and guidance.
- A wider programme of training and dissemination will be provided to students at all participating universities.

Expected outcomes

- Challenge Lab model tested in Tunisia and UK.
- Enhanced knowledge exchange and enterprise capabilities in Tunisia and UK.
- Long-term partnerships and future collaborative opportunities between Tunisian and UK institutions.
- Students from participating institutions gain experience of working in an entrepreneurial framework.
- Option for businesses to fund suitable solutions post-project.

Business Clinics/Innovation Consultancies

The Tunisia-UK Business Clinic Programme can create a unique cross-border collaboration platform. This could bring students from both countries together to solve real-world business challenges, especially for companies looking to expand across African, Middle Eastern, and European markets.

In an increasingly globalised world, businesses need culturally diverse insights, international market intelligence, and innovation-driven problem solving. Universities play a critical role in equipping students with practical experience, and business clinics have emerged as powerful mechanisms for connecting students directly with real business challenges.

Liverpool John Moores University's Business Clinic model has demonstrated how students can act as consultants for businesses, providing fresh perspectives, research-backed solutions, and innovative strategies. By adapting this model to a Tunisia-UK bilateral context, this proposal aims to create a collaborative Business Clinic Programme that brings together students and businesses from both countries.

Objectives

The Tunisia-UK Business Clinic will:

- Facilitate cross-border business problem-solving by matching student teams with SMEs, startups, and larger companies operating in Tunisia, the UK, and beyond.
- Enhance employability by giving students real-world consulting experience in international business settings.
- Support businesses (especially SMEs and startups) with research, market insights, and innovative solutions at no direct cost.
- Promote entrepreneurship through co-creation of business models suited for both UK and Tunisian contexts.
- Strengthen university-business collaboration while fostering international partnerships between Tunisian and UK universities.

Proposed model's structure

- Joint Business Clinic Platform hosted by lead universities in Tunisia and the UK.
- Student teams (mixed UK and Tunisian students) work remotely on real challenges presented by participating businesses.
- Businesses benefit from fresh ideas, market research, and tailored solutions, while students gain hands-on consulting experience.

The success of business clinics relies on their integration into the curriculum. For UK universities, projects of this nature typically occur between November and April, aligning with the curriculum delivery of the relevant modules.

Activities

Phase	Description
Call for Challenges	Tunisian and UK businesses submit real business problems they want students to address.
Student Recruitment	Open call for students (business, marketing, entrepreneurship, data science, etc.) to form cross-border teams.
Training and Induction	Workshops on consulting skills, intercultural communication, and understanding UK-Tunisian business landscapes.
Live Business Clinics	Teams engage directly with businesses, conduct research, and develop solutions under academic supervision.
Pitch and Feedback Sessions	Final presentations to businesses and university panels, followed by feedback and networking.
Follow-Up and Publication	Selected successful projects could evolve into internships, joint ventures, or research publications.

Focus areas

The clinics can focus on key sectors such as:

Sector	Examples of business challenges
Digital Economy	Expanding e-commerce between UK and Tunisia
Tourism and Hospitality	Developing sustainable tourism models post-Covid-19
Agribusiness	Exploring new supply chain technologies
Health Tech	Launching health innovations in both markets
Renewable Energy	Business models for solar and wind startups

Benefits

Students	Real consulting experience, intercultural skills, employability boost
Businesses	Practical, research-driven solutions, international market insights
Universities	Stronger business links, enhanced international profile

Governments

Supporting trade, innovation, and youth employment through education-business alignment

About NCEE

NCEE is an international organisation that focuses on promoting and developing entrepreneurial universities. We are a platform and collaborative network for sharing best practices, research and insights related to enterprise, entrepreneurship and innovation. NCEE brings together academia, higher education professionals and policy leaders to exchange knowledge and expertise to drive economic growth and societal impact. We facilitate dialogue, organise events and training programmes and provide resources to help universities foster innovation and entrepreneurship. As a collective voice, we champion entrepreneurial universities leveraging the talent and skills in higher education. Find out more: www.ncee.org.uk, or contact ceri.nursaw@ncee.org.uk

About the British Council

The British Council is the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. The British Council supports peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide, uniquely combining the UK's deep expertise in arts and culture, education and the English language, with a global presence and relationships in over 100 countries. The British Council works directly with individuals to help them gain the skills, confidence and connections to transform their lives and shape a better world in partnership with the UK, and works with governments and partners in the education, English language and cultural sectors, in the UK and globally. Find out more: <https://www.britishcouncil.tn/en>, or contact jill.coates@britishcouncil.org and hayfa.kebsi@britishcouncil.org